THE TARJUMĀN AL-QUR'ĀN



VOLUME THREE

AL-TAWBA TO AL-MUMINUN

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

Edited and renered into English by

Syed Abdul Latif

THE TARJUMĀN AL-QUR'ĀN

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BY

MAWLANA ABUL KALAM AZAD

EDITED AND
RENDERED INTO ENGLISH BY

DR. SYED ABDUL LATIF

VOLUME THREE

AL-TAWBA TO AL-MU'MINUN

DR. SYED ABDUL LATIF
TRUST FOR QUR'ANIC CULTURAL RESEARCH
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

كَتَبَ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ

He hath imposed on Himself the exercise of Mercy. (Q. 6:12)

نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَٰبَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَىٰةَ وَالْإِنجِيلَ ۙ مِن قَبْلُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَنزَلَ الْفُرْقَانَ

He hath sent down to thee the Book, bearing the Truth, and confirming the Scriptures which preceded it. Prior to this He sent down the Torah and Evangel for man's guidance, and sent down the Criterion. (Q. 3:3)

هَٰذَا بَلَٰغٌ لِّلنَّاسِ وَلِيُنذَرُوا بِهِ وَلِيَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا هُوَ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ وَلِيَذَّكَّرَ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَٰبِ ۝

This is a message for mankind that they may be warned thereby (against evil living), and that they may know that God is but One, and that men of understanding may reflect over it.

(Q. 14:52)

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FOREWORD

The trustees of Dr. Syed Abdul Latif's Trust for Qur'ānic and Cultural Studies have the pleasure of presenting to those interested in Islam and Comparative Religion the third and the final volume of Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad's monumental work, the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān.* The Mawlana was one of the most outstanding scholars of Islam of the twentieth century and was, at the same time, one of his country's foremost leaders in her struggle for independence and her first Minister for Education for over a decade. However, future generations will remember him for his scholarship and contribution to Islamic learning. His exposition of the Qur'ānic thought took different forms mostly of articles in his two weekly journals, the *Al-Hilāl* and the *Al-Balāgh.* Of his major works, the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* is regarded on all hands as his greatest contribution.

Mawlana Azad was firmly of the view that under the influence of Greek and Iranian philosophy, latter day commentators of the Qur'ān had side-tracked the earlier authentic interpretations and read new meanings into the Qur'ānic word. The plain meaning of the plain word was given up and the allegorical or the figurative meanings were given, which were in a sense, alien to the spirit of the Book. The Mawlana tried to give to the Qur'ānic word the interpretation it was originally meant to bear—an attempt at explaining the message of the Qur'ān in its simplicity and directness divested of the mystery that clouds most interpretative works on religion.

The three published volumes of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'an* cover the first eighteen parts (twenty three chapters) of

Qur'ān. The first volume, originally published in Urdu in 1930, is a comprehensive commentary of the ***Sūrat ul-Fātiha*** the opening chapter, which in seven brief verses concentrates within its ambit the thought-content of the entire Qur'ān. The second Urdu volume was published in 1936 and deals with chapters two to eight. The third volume dealing with chapters nine to twenty three was published years later. It is unfortunate that the manuscript of Mawlana Azad's commentary on the rest of the chapters could not be traced either in his lifetime or since, and this has deprived those interested in meaningful study of the Qur'ān, of the benefit of the vast learning and simple exposition of the author of this commentary.

At Mawlana Azad's request the late, Dr. Syed Abdul Latif, Professor of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad, India, a scholar of repute in Islamic studies and the author of the renowned book *The Mind Al-Qur'ān Builds* and other works like *Bases of Islamic Culture* and *Al-Qur'ān Rendered into English*, undertook the task of rendering the thought-content of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* into English. The manuscript of the first volume was approved by the Mawlana a few days before his death. The book appeared in print in 1962. The second volume was published in 1967. Although the manuscript of the third volume was sent to the press as far back as 1968, it could not be published for reasons beyond the control of the Trust and despite his eagerness, the late Dr. Abdul Latif could not see the result of his long labour of love. The book now being presented to the reading public has been published from a duplicate of the manuscript entrusted by the late Dr. S. A. Latif to our colleague, Mr. Nizamuddin Ahmed. When this copy was taken up for preparation for the press, it was found that the translation and commentary of chapter 10 'Jonah' was missing. Failing in its efforts to trace the missing papers, the Trust requested Mr. Muhammad Anver, Reader in English,

Osmania University, Hyderabad, and one devoted to Islamic studies, to undertake the work of filling up the gap in the book, which he has done. The Trust is immensely grateful to him.

This volume would not have seen the light of the day but for the sincere co-operation and help received from a number of friends. The Trust is greatly indebted to Mr. Hooseini Doctor of the firm of Hooseini Doctor & Co., Solicitors, Bombay, for his continued interest in this work and his legal advice. We are also grateful to: Mrs. Sultana Ahmed, Dr. F. Ahmed, Dr. A. Raza, Mr. M. Ahmed, Mr. A. H. Talib, Dr. M. W. Siddiqee, Mr. M. S. Mirza, Mr. A. Hameed Siddiqee, Mrs. G. Alladin, the Nathani Charitable Trust, Mr. P.M. Elavia, Mr. Bardenvala, Mr. A. Razack, Mr. Nasiruddin Ahmed, Dr. A. Qadeer Siddiquee and Dr. Masoud Ghouri for their generous donations. It is gratifying to note that most of our donors belong to the younger generation residing in the West. Their interest in the Qur'ân is a good augury for the future of Islam.

Our thanks are also due to a number of other friends whose zeal and untiring efforts help bring out this volume. Dr. Mohammad Yousufuddin, Reader, Department of Arabic, Osmania University read and Mr. Muhammad Anver, Reader in English revised Dr. Abdul Latif's manuscript to eliminate typographical errors, corrected proofs and prepared the index. Mr. Mohammad Abdulla, I.A.S. (Retd) supervised the completion of work. Mr. A.R. Rawoot helped the Trust in diverse matters connected with this work. We the trustees are most grateful to them. We cannot recompense them. Their recompense lies with Allah.

We are grateful to Mr. Justice Sharfuddin Ahmed, H.C.S., Director, Da'iratu'l-Ma'arifi'l-Osmania, Osmania University, Hyderabad, for undertaking to print this volume despite prior commitments.

Lastly and most importantly, we had delegated the entire responsibility for the publication of the volume to our colleague, Mr. Nizamuddin Ahmed, I.A.S. (Retd). Single-handedly, he collected funds, and arranged for and supervised the printing of this volume facing all the problems, that the publication of a book of this importance poses. The result of his efforts is now before the readers. . We, his colleagues, offer him our most sincere thanks.

We end our foreword with a fervent prayer for the departed souls of Mawlanā Abul Kalam Azad and Dr. Syed Abdul Latif.

May their souls rest in peace.

DR. SYED ABDUL MANNAN
Chairman
Dr. Syed Abdul Latif's Trust for Qur'ānic & other Cultural Studies

Hyderabad
January 1, 1978

PREFACE

Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad

While issuing this additional volume of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, it seems necessary to draw attention to the following.

The object of compiling the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* was to afford a general knowledge of the Qur'ānic teachings in a handy volume such as may offer to the reader something more explicit than a mere translation of the Qur'ānic text, but which should by no means assume the form of an elaborate commentary. With this end in view, a method was adopted which could render the translation self-explanatory, supported wherever necessary by appropriate marginal notes leaving the presentation of a formal commentary and the exposition of the principles underlying the Qur'ānic injunctions of observations on life to two separate volumes, one styled *Muqaddima* or prolegomena, the other, *Al-Bayān* or exposition, both of which were in the course of preparation.

But after the issuing of the first volume of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* (which in its English translation occupies three volumes) it was realised that the original plan referred to above, however suitable to the presentation of the subject, was not very much to the liking of the general reader, who was desirous of knowing my views thereon without waiting for the appearance of the *Muqaddima* and *Al-Bayān*. He desired to have the entire picture of it before him at once. In the words of a poet, he "preferred to have a cup of wine today to the promise of a round of cups tomorrow."

The task of spreading over a limited canvas a wide range of subjects was indeed a trying one. But that was not

to be helped. Necessarily, therefore, I had to apply the break to the movement of my pen at almost every step. The process inevitably wrought a distinct change in my method of presentation. The volume had now no longer to offer a translation in Urdu of the Qur'ānic text supported by occasional notes as in the previous volume of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*. It was now to offer a commentary as well, and discuss at times in detail some of the important issues arising out of the text. No doubt, these discussions could not afford to be as elaborate as in the contemplated *Al-Bayān*. Still, an attempt had to be made to cover in my discussions all the salient aspects of the themes presented in every chapter of the Qur'ān.

With this end in view, the following plan of presentation has been adopted. In the first place, care has been taken to let no important aspect of any theme go unnoticed. Every such aspect has been commented on; so much so that the notes supplied in exposition of the different aspects are not only lengthier than the notes furnished in the previous volume, but are nearly twice in number. Not merely this, at the end of each chapter, an attempt has been made to give a review of its contents as a whole and add to it wherever necessary a regular dissertation on this or that aspect of the subject as called for particular attention. Some of these dissertations, despite my attempt at brevity, have become somewhat lengthy. Indeed, the notes and dissertations furnished in this manner will form by themselves a fairly bulky volume, with the result that the present volume is in the extent of its matter nearly twice in size as the first volume of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*.

To make this clear to the reader, I may state that a dissertation of twenty-six pages of double crown size has been added to the matter covered by the Qur'ānic chapter, 'Al-Tawba' and another of thirty-eight such notes under 'Al-A'rāf' alone, with ten pages of commentary thereon added at the end. Similarly, an

essay has been furnished under chapter, 'Hūd,' explaining the place and value of the Biblical and other stories incorporated therein. Further, apart from the numerous notes given under the chapter, 'Yūsuf,' an essay of nearly twenty pages has been supplied at the end, by way of a critical review of the entire matter covered by that chapter. The same procedure has, more or less, been adopted in respect of other chapters.

Thus it is that the matter which this volume of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* contains is larger in extent than what was originally planned for it. Indeed, the matter covered by the critical notes and dissertations is by no means less in volume than what would have been given in the *Al-Bayān*.

It has to be pointed out, that since the method followed in this volume was not observed in the previous volume, notes and dissertations on a similar scale could not be furnished therein. The shortcoming has been met in this volume. The contents of such verses of the previous volume as would have called for detailed comment under the plan followed here, have in one form or another, been repeated by the Qur'ān itself in its textual matter covered by the present volume. Occasion, therefore has been taken to give to such verses special attention. It is in this way that what had been left unattended to in the previous volume has been dealt with in the proper detail in this volume. Certain themes, however, of the previous volume not touched upon in the Qur'ānic text of this volume could not in like manner be dealt with in the present volume—themes such as the story of Adam, the migration of Israelites, the rights of women, and the law of inheritance. These will come under review only in the text of the third volume* of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*.

The matter that was originally planned to be covered by the *Muqaddima* and *Al-Bayān* has been incorporated in this

* The third volume could not be published in the life-time of Mawlana Azad. The fact is noted in my preface to Vol. I of the English translation of the *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, on page XV—S.A.L.

volume, and the rest of it will find its place in the next. The present volume goes up to the chapter entitled 'Al-Mu'minūn.' The third volume will begin with the chapter, 'Al-Nūr' and close with the last chapter of the Qur'ān, 'Al-Nās.' The third volume will necessarily run into about seven hundred pages, especially because it is proposed to provide to this volume a variety of informative addenda.

Every work of a serious nature has some specific purpose to serve and necessarily displays a distinctive feature of its own. So far as the *Tarjumān* is concerned, what lends to the volume its distinction is the style of the translation it gives to the Qur'ānic text—a style of translation which enables the reader to catch the exact meaning of the original lain out of sight till now, and acquaint him for the first time with the fundamental bases on which the teaching of the Qur'ān takes its stand and the principles or values of life which it sponsors for the good of man. Every word or phrase employed therein to bring out the sense of the original has been chosen to stimulate thought and reflection and open out before the thoughtful a vista of fresh and fresher visions of beauty of the Qur'ānic message and thus help them grasp the truth embedded in the Qur'ānic phraseology.

Another striking feature of this volume is the provision made therein of appropriate marginal notes. These are necessarily brief in form. But they indicate, nevertheless, a very wide expanse of thought and reflection. It may therefore be asserted that every phrase of the notes and indeed every sentence therein furnishes, in its compactness, a wide range of commentary. In fact, the reader will realise that the writer has not in these notes given full expression to the world of thought latent in the Qur'ānic word. But it is hoped that he will not fail to perceive, in the brief notes given here, the entire gamut of thought that was struggling in his mind for fuller verbal expression. A flash should suffice the thoughtful to catch the full vision of its source. The marginal notes therefore call for very careful study. The

greater the attention paid in this respect, the deeper the impress that will form itself on the mind of the reader, of the variety and vastness of thought, pertinent to the life of man that the Qur'ān offers for his earnest consideration.

It is not easy to convey to the reader an idea of the arduous processes which were involved in disclosing the meaning of the Qur'ān. What should matter to him are the results achieved. The aim of the writer was not to indulge in laborious disquisition or tedious commentary. On the other hand, his primary concern was to follow certain principles of approach to the Qur'ān, and give out a clear and comprehensive picture of all that the Qur'ān has presented for the earnest consideration of man. He has not disclosed to the reader, the strenuous efforts that he had to make, and the obstacles that he had to overcome, to find out for the reader all that had for long been lost to sight. Had he done that, the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* would have taken a different form for what it was intended to be.

At the moment we have to reckon with two sets of intellectuals, the *'ulamā* and those who have received modern education. The first group is conversant with the old lines of approach, but has no adequate knowledge of the trends of the present-day thought. The other group is impressed by the demands of advancing time, but is not conversant with the old lines of thought and cannot realise the difficulties which beset a right approach to the Qur'ān. This being the situation, neither the one group nor the other is in a position to appraise correctly the nature of the task which the present writer has ventured to discharge. Unfortunately, there is at the moment no third group to step in to do this.

The difficulty that the writer had to contend with may easily be realised, if one should place before oneself all the extant translations of the Qur'ān available in Urdu and Persian, and a few of the early well-known commentaries thereon, particularly the *Tafsīr-i-Kabīr* which marks the

height to which our early commentators could rise. A comparison may then be instituted between the interpretation of the Qur'ān as embodied in these works and that in the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*. For this purpose, any one of the chapters may be singled out for comparison, verse by verse. Should this be done in right earnest, one will not fail to make the striking difference in approach. But where is one to find those who may be disposed to make such an effort? The writer is, however, content with the thought that he has pursued his task solely for its own sake, with no thought of seeking any approbation from any quarter.

It may be noted that at the beginning of this volume lists are furnished of the contents of all the chapters of the Qur'ān included therein. Even these may afford scope for thought and reflection. The reader may not go through the entire textual matter of the *Tarjumān*. Should he even confine his attention to the lists of the contents, he is bound to gather an amount of knowledge of the Qur'ānic themes such as he may not be able to do otherwise so easily. They present in a comprehensive and succinct manner, not only a systematized view of the Qur'ānic content as given out in the chapters covered by this volume, but also of the writer's own commentary thereon.

It may be stated here, that when the first volume of the *Tarjumān* was in the press, a friend of the writer who had not as yet read the work but had by chance looked only into the lists of contents of the second chapter, 'Al-Baqara,' felt it so fully informative and satisfying to him, that he ventured to deliver a full-fledged lecture on the chapter 'Al-Baqara' solely on the strength of the knowledge that he had gathered from what was given out in the list of its contents which he had perused. In the present volume, the lists of contents have been prepared on the same lines as followed in the previous volume. It is hoped that these lines will serve as a source of additional knowledge to the reader.

In the third or the next volume of the *Tarjumān*, it is proposed to have at the end of it a classified list of contents alphabetically arranged. This list will sum up under each head all that has been dealt with in the entire body of the Qur'ān, and may naturally prove very useful to those who have to make a special study of it.

> "Cheer them with good tiding My servants
> who hearken to My Word
> and appreciate in action its excellence.
>
> These are they whom God guideth
> and these are they who are
> to be regarded as men of insight."

(Q. 39:17–18)

Moti Nagar
Congress Camp, Lucknow.

ABUL KALAM
13th April, 1936

CHAPTER IX

THE REPENTANCE—AL-TAWBA

REVEALED AT MADINA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1-6

HOWEVER hostile one's attitude in tracing the history of Islam, there are certain aspects of it which will arrest one's attention as deserving of admiration. One is this : the opposition to the Prophet from every quarter in Arabia was always distinguished by violence and bloodshed and deception and low tactics. On the other hand, the attitude displayed by the followers of the Prophet against this treatment by their opponents was one of patience and forbearance, truth and straightforward honesty and highminded forgiveness. Patience in the hour of trial, resoluteness in meeting encounters, straight dealings in mutual transactions, and forbearance and forgiveness in moments of strength are some of those exceptional features of human history which were rarely displayed simultaneously in the life of any single personality as in that of the Prophet of Islam.

There is no parallel in history to the treatment meted out to the Prophet of Islam by his own people, the Quraish of Mecca.

It was marked by violence on the one hand, and callous disregard for engagements solemnly made on the other. The last incident in this series of happenings was the treaty of Ḥudaibiya. The parties to the treaty were the Prophet and his allies on the one side and on the other the Quraish and their allies. The tribe of Khuzā'a was on the side of the Prophet and the tribe of Banū Bakr on that of the Quraish. The treaty entered into was to the effect that for

a period of ten years there should be no warfare between the two parties and that utmost peace should prevail in their mutual relations. But hardly had two years passed when the tribe of Banū Bakr attacked the tribe of Khuzā'a. The Quraish came to help the former. Indeed, Suhail bin 'Umar who had signed the treaty of Ḥudaibiya on behalf of the Quraish was among those who led the attack on the Khuzā'a. The tribe of Khuzā'a took refuge in the holy place of Ka'ba and in the name of God sought protection from their enemies. Despite this appeal of theirs, a good many of them were attacked and killed. Only about forty people could manage to escape and flee to the Prophet at Madina before whom they detailed the sufferings they had suffered at the hands of the Quraish.

The violation of the treaty of Ḥudaibiya by the Quraish coming on the top of similar defections in the past was not an affair easily to be overlooked. The Prophet had to take action. With ten thousand followers of his from Madina, he came to Mecca to restore peace and order. His entry into Mecca was marked by little violence or bloodshed.

Some time after the occupation of Mecca, in the ninth year of the Hijra, the first thirty or forty verses of this chapter were delivered. The Prophet deputed Abū Bakr and 'Alī in the month of Dhiqa'da, during the month preceding that of the Ḥajj pilgrimage, to announce these verses to those who would assemble there for the Ḥajj. The announcement was to the following effect.

(a) The covenants entered into having been openly violated by the enemy were considered no longer co-operative. Still, consideration would be shown to them to the extent that they would be free to move about for a period of four months from the day of the Ḥajj onward till the 10th of Rabī'u'l-Ākhir. This period over, the state of war would be resumed.

(b) But the treaty of Hudaibiya will continue to be in force and respected in relation to those tribes who had not broken the treaty or violated it.

(c) Since the sanctity of the holy place of Mecca had been violated by the non-Muslim Arabs, and its precincts on their account became the scene of filthy activities, the entry into it will be restricted only to those who believed in the unity of God and observed purity of life (verse 28).

The last verses of this chapter were also delivered during the ninth year of the Hijra, while the Prophet was on an expedition to Tabūk and a little thereafter.

It may be pointed out that the declaration of war against the polytheists was against those Arab non-Muslim tribes who would like to give no quarter to the mission of the Prophet and were bent on its destruction. The verses are addressed to such polytheists and not to the polytheists in general. From the beginning of the chapter right up to its end the chapter dwells on the manner in which these tribes had broken repeatedly the pledges given by them or the engagements entered into between them and the Prophet and the attempts they repeatedly made to inflict serious injuries on his followers.

Verse 5 makes it clear that only those groups of Arabs will be recognised as Muslims, who should not only profess the faith openly, but act up to its precepts, the primary proof thereof lying in the arrangement they made for congregational prayers and the payment of *zakāt* or the levy for the maintenance of the weak and the depressed among the community.

Here distinction is made between dereliction of duty on the part of an individual and dereliction of duty on the part of a group of which the individual is a member. If an individual fails on any account to observe these two condi-

tions, he will be regarded a sinner. But if a group as a whole has deliberately declined to observe the two conditions, such a group cannot be entitled to be recognised as Muslim. These few words may settle the issue touching the neglect of observance of prescribed prayers, if care is properly exercised in viewing the subject in right perspective.

Attention is drawn here to the fact that even in times of war, the Prophet kept open the door of voluntary entry into the fold of Islam and that at no time compulsion was resorted to during the period of his mission. Indeed, verse 6 states that even during the time of war, should anyone feel the urge to understand Islam, he should be given asylum and allowed the opportunity of understanding the Qur'ānic message and if after that, should he care to return to his home, arrangement should be made to give him a safe conduct to it,- so that having returned to his own home he should be left to reflect over the question, whether he should or should not accept the new faith.

It is emphasised that the reception of an idea is not enough for adoption. One should have the opportunity to reflect over it and scrutinize its value to life in an intelligible or rational manner. This makes it clear that a mere announcement of the Qur'ānic message is not enough. The listener must be allowed the time to reflect over it and see if he can sincerely agree to it. The Qur'ān does not countenance compulsion in religion or an unthinking yielding to its truth.

[1] (O ye Muslims) Here is a declaration
from God and His Prophet
to those with whom you have been in league
till now from among the (Arab) polytheists
that you are no longer in obligation to fulfil
on your part the condition of the covenant
entered into with them.

[2] Tell them : "You are now free
to move about in the land as you like
for four months ; (thereafter the state of
war will be resumed). But bear in mind
that you cannot weaken God on any account.
On the other hand,
God will put to shame those who believe not
in Him (and this He will do at the hands
of those who believe in Him).

[3] This is a proclamation
on the part of God and His Apostle to those
who assemble on the great occasion
of the pilgrimage (Ḥajj) to the effect
that God has cleared Himself from all obligations
to these polytheists even as His Apostle does.
So, tell them : "If ye turn to God even now,
it will be better for you ;
but if ye still decline to do so,
make it clear to yourselves
that ye shall not weaken God."
O Prophet ! Announce to those who believe not
that a great chastisement awaiteth them.

[4] But (O Prophet !) this absolution
shall not apply to the covenant
entered into with those polytheists
who in accordance therewith have failed you
in no way nor aided any one against you.
So observe all engagements
with them as agreed to,
during the period of the covenant.
God indeed liketh those
who respect their engagements.

[5] But when the sacred months
are passed, (the state of war is resumed) ;
(in this state) put down the polytheists

(who are against you) wherever you find them.
and capture them and beleaguer them
and lie in wait for them at every ambush.
But if they turn to God
and observe prayer
and pay the obligatory poor dues,
then do not pursue them any longer
for God will forgive them (their past)
and admit them to His mercy.

[6] If (O Prophet!) any of the polytheists
should seek thy protection
grant them an asylum
that they may know the Word of God,
then give them a safe conduct
to their own place of security.
This is necessary
because they are after all a simple folk
who had been unaware of the truth
advanced for their good.

SECTION 2 : VERSES 7-19

Verses 7 to 12 have made it clear that it was the persistent violation of engagement by the enemy and their hatred and oppression of the Muslims which eventually forced the latter to declare a war of defence against the former. The Qur'ān now declares that any engagement entered into with the enemy when so wilfully violated by them cannot be regarded as valid any longer, especially when the last of the engagements, namely of Ḥudaibiya had been wilfully broken by them. Of course, points out the Qur'ān, that should any of the groups who are a party to any treaty care to observe it or are willing to stand by it, it was the duty of the Muslims to fulfil their part of the treaty most solemnly; for, Islam never permits under any circumstance any violation of a pledge solemnly given even to the bitterest enemy.

The Qur'ān observes that the hatred of the enemy towards the Muslims is so deep and intense that they are determined to leave no Muslim alive in the land. In a situation such as this, any hesitation on the part of the Muslims to declare war on the enemy, will seriously jeopardise their very future. Verse 13 points out that it was the enemy who had started the war by banishing many helpless Muslims from their homes and started attacking them everywhere. So if the Muslims are now forced to take up arms to defend themselves, the responsibility for the war should rest with the enemy.

Now think over, as to what was the object of the Qur'ān in calling upon the Muslims to take up arms against their enemy? Whenever it did, the object was stated in clear terms. Verse 12 points out that the aim of waging war against the enemy is to press the enemy to give up oppression of the weak and to fulfil scrupulously the pledges given by them. Likewise, in verse 57 of the chapter, 'Spoils of War,' the object is to induce in the enemy the mood to reflect over their misdeeds and make amends. Even so, the object of the latest permission given to Muslims to fight the enemy is not to seek any revenge or make any worldly gains, but simply to bring home to the enemy that they should desist from oppression. The Qur'ān never permits the continuation of war even for a moment when the object is achieved or is in sight. In pursuance of this attitude, it has always asked the Muslims to keep the door open for the enemy to enter into peaceful relations with them, despite the severest wrongs done to them.

Verse 14 offers to the Muslims the good tidings of a successful end to their struggle. Addressing them, it states:

(a) that the enemy will suffer a defeat at their hands;

(b) that the enemy will be humiliated,

(c) that they will come out victorious,

(d) that the believers will reach the stage in life when

they will forget all the sufferings that they had suffered at the hands of the enemy,

(e) that they will cease to bear any grudge against their erstwhile enemies, and

(f) that those who have to repent for their misdeeds will repent and take to the right path.

So, be it noted that every one of the good tidings given here came to be true. Polytheism among the Arabs was wholly rooted out. Those who had for nearly twenty years oppressed the Muslims were no longer in a position to do any further harm to the Arab society. The prolonged sufferings of the Muslims became a thing of the past and the Arabs as a new community imbued with a high ideal of life soon developed into a model society drawing respectful attention of the nations living around them.

From verse 17, the Qur'ān turns to another subject which is linked to the subject just dealt with in the previous verses. This touches the question of the Ka'ba, the House of Prayer. The Qur'ān states that Ka'ba had been erected as a place of prayer for those who believed in the unity of God. The polytheists of Arabia had violated its sanctity. It was why 'Alī, the Prophet's son-in-law and the future Khalif of Islam, had been deputed by the Prophet in the ninth year of the Hijra to announce from the seat of Ka'ba that the polytheists would no longer be allowed from the following year to observe any polytheistic rites in this House of Prayer. Verse 17 introduces this subject.

The Quraish prided themselves on the fact that they were the custodians of the Ka'ba or the Holy Place of Prayer and guide the pilgrims in the performance of the rites associated with it. Whenever a group of people ceases to attach importance to the purposes underlying the fundamental beliefs of a religion and to the deeds that should be done in pursuance of them, its members make a fetish of

ritual or the outward show of religion and claim on that basis veneration at the hands of those outside of their group. This indeed is the situation among the present day Muslims. The veneration accorded to the *sajjada-nashin* of a *dargah* or the successor to any notable person buried therein, or to the *mutawalli* or *mujawir* of any place of pilgrimage is hardly attainable by even the best of the pious or the righteous among the Muslims. Few will turn to respect an upright man or one who lives a good life. But thousands will hasten to kiss the feet of a *sajjoda-nashin* or a *mutawalli* of a *dargah*, though living a blatantly impious life.

How does the Qur'ān meet this perversity with reference to what used to happen at the Ka'ba. It proclaims that it is not piety simply to provide drinking water to the pilgrims or to arrange profuse light for the Ka'ba. True piety lies in entertaining right beliefs and in the performance of good deeds in consonance of those beliefs.

The Qur'ān also makes it clear that only truly pious men should be the custodians of the Ka'ba and shall look after those who visit it. Incidentally, the point is emphasised that no one who lives a life of impiety should be the *mutawalli* or the manager of any mosque for the simple reason that there is nothing common between such a *mutawalli* and the atmosphere of the mosque. The mosque is a place where one turns to God, and the *mutawalli* of the type described here is a man who turns away from Him.

Verse 18 while stating that he alone is a Muslim who believes in God and observes prayer and pays the poor-due emphasises that he should fear none in life except God. The last condition is significant.

[7] How can the covenant of the polytheists
be trusted by God and His Apostle
except that of those with whom
you entered into at the Holy Place of Prayer

(since these people have not so far violated it).
Keep faith with them
as long as they keep faith with you.
God is pleased with those
who keep their engagement.

[8] How indeed can the covenant
of the polytheists be trusted. They are
a people who, whenever they get the better
of you, respect neither the ties of kinship
nor any engagement they have entered into.
They try to cajole you with mere words
while their hearts belie them. And most of them
are a perverse lot (who have refused to yield
to the demands of truth).

[9] They have bartered the revelations
of God for a paltry price (by yielding
to base passions and declining
to pay heed to Divine admonitions).
They turn others aside from the way
of God. How evil is what they do!

[10] They respect neither ties of kinship
with the believers nor any engagements
entered into with them. They
are those who indulge in excesses.

[11] Yet if they should repent
and observe prayer and pay the poor-due
then, (you should not go against them but)
regard them as brethren in faith.
We make our instructions clear
to men of understanding.

[12] But if after taking oaths of alliance
with you they break them
and revile your religion, then

in order to desist them from
further mischief do battle with their leaders
who have induced them to be faithless
and who have no respect
for oaths solemnly taken.

[13] Will ye not fight against those
who have broken their oaths
and tried to expel the Apostle and attacked
you first? Do you really fear them?
(If you do, you are not men of faith).
If you really are believers in God, then it is God
of Whom you should be rightly mindful.

[14] So, make war on them.
God will chastise them through
your instrumentality and will put them to shame
by giving you victory over them
and remove from the breasts of the believers
all bitterness entertained (till now).

[15] And eradicate from their hearts
whatever feeling of anger that there was therein.
God in His mercy will relent
towards whomsoever He may: for, God
in His Wisdom knows what needs to be done.

[16] (O Muslims!) Do you think that
you will be left to lie still while God has yet
to make known who among you are yet to bear
successfully the trials ahead of you
and who have to prove that they hold
none as friends except God and His Apostle
and the faithful! God is fully
apprised of what you do.

[17] It is not for the polytheists
to attend the places where God is worshipped

while they continue to be witnesses
against themselves of infidelity to God.
These are the people
whose work will come to nought
and in Fire shall they abide.

[18] He alone has the privilege
to attend the places where God is worshipped,
who believeth in God and the Last Day
and observes prayer and pays the poor-due
and fears none but God.
These are they of whom
it may be expected that they will
prove themselves to be rightly guided.

[19] Do you place him who gives drink
to the pilgrims and attends the Holy Place
of Prayer on the same level with him
who believes in God and the Last Day
and striveth in the way of God?
In the estimate of God
they are not held equal. It is not
in the manner of God to guide aright
those who wilfully fall into excesses.

SECTION 3: VERSES 20-28

The criterion of superiority of one over another in the sight of God is indicated in verse 20. It states that they rank the highest who have sacrificed everything in the path of truth and endure steadfastly the trials and tribulations that befell them on the way of truth. That is the criterion of goodness. It is a lesson for the present day Muslims who have developed an outlook on life and follow a way of living so alien to the teachings of Islam. Even like the pagan Arabs of the Prophet's time, they prefer the traditional way as against the way of life laid down for them by Islam.

Whenever a rich man living a thoroughly un-Islamic life provides booths (*sabil*) of cool drinks during the days of Muharram and arranges the celebration of the Prophet's Day (*mawlūd*) on a lavish scale or pays for lighting a mosque or a *dargah* on a particular day, the entire Muslim community exultingly applauds him, and no one cares to know whether what he did was for the sake of God. One should remember that such deeds do not constitute righteousness in the sight of God. Goodness lies only in the purity of belief in God and sincerity in action and steadfast endurance of trials in the way of God That is the criterion of goodness sponsored by the Qur'ān.

It has been pointed out above that this chapter was revealed in the ninth year of Hijra and that the earlier verses of it were publicly announced during the period of Ḥajj that year. This was the time when Mecca had already been conquered and the strength of the enemies put down for ever on the field of Ḥunain. For the expedition to Tabūk as many as thirty thousand Muslims, had assembled, so much so that there remained no party in the Arabian peninsula to challenge the supremacy of the followers of the Prophet. Still there lurked in the situation a few weaknesses :

(a) A large number of Meccans who had opposed the Prophet but had been pardoned by him at the time of his victorious entry into Mecca had joined the Muslim fold. Being new converts to Islam, they could not fit into its way of life quickly. So when war was declared on those, who were still opposed to the Prophet in the country and were giving no rest to its followers, a number of the new Meccan converts began to feel concerned about their relations who were in the enemy camps. In fact, they could not rise above their sense of kinship with them or their tribal prejudices, and so formed but a weak wing of the Muslim camp.

(b) There were also in the Muslim camp quite a number of hypocrites and timid people. They raised the cry that now that much had been gained for the Muslims, there was no longer any need for them to engage themselves in further warfare.

(c) The victories which the Muslims had won on the battlefield had developed in them a general sense of indifference to any possible danger lying ahead of them. The majority of them thought that now that the Arab land had nearly yielded to the call of Truth and that there was left no strength among those who had not yet chosen to yield to the call, there was no imperative need to be on the alert. They hardly could realise at the moment the height of power and influence that destiny had marked them to reach. This development in the situation was clearly a source of danger to the security of the Muslims not only at this hour but in the days to follow as well.

The necessity therefore was felt to revive in the Muslims the spirit of sincere attachment to their faith and bring home to them once again the high purpose for which they were to live and work as earnestly as ever before. They were to be told that the period of trials was not yet over and that on the other hand it was just to begin. Of the task lying ahead of them, what was of primary importance at the moment was the liquidating of whatever opposition that there still was to the mission of the Prophet and to establish perfect peace and order in the land.

It is why verse 16 calls upon the Muslims to reflect over the situation and realise, that that was not the hour when they should relax their efforts to reach their goal. It states that the faith which they professed had yet to be tested in full. So in the succeeding verses after drawing attention to the character that should distinguish the Muslims, a significant observation is made in verse 23 that the sense of sincere

attachment to one's faith and the sense of loyalty to those who were opposed to the faith could not subsist together or felt simultaneously in one's mind. It therefore behoved the followers of the faith that they should have nothing to do with even their parents and brothers if they belonged to the enemy camp.

Verse 24 is emphatic in asserting that in a conflict between faith and denial of faith, he alone will be regarded as a man of faith or faithful whom nothing in the world, not even one's love for those near and dear to him, should weaken his attachment or devotion to his faith. It is on this basis that the edifice of a civilised society can be raised. It refers to all the essential ties which one has necessarily to respect in life. But the principle of devotion to an ideology such as that which functions for the security and welfare of a society as a whole, demands from every one professing faith in his ideology that he should rise far above every other form of attachment and let nothing detract him from serving whole-heartedly the cause of truth which that ideology upholds.

The Qur'ān also draws particular attention to the attachment one feels to one's worldly comfort in life and so might like one's country not to involve itself in any war. For instance, one might be gaining wealth by pursuing the avocation of commerce. In a state of war, opportunities for commerce may be lessened. That is a fear which is bound to stare in the face of every one living on commerce. Further, in a state of war one stands the risk of losing one's possessions. The thought of the risk will naturally disturb one immensely. Before such as these who are moved by considerations of this nature, the Qur'ān places an abiding truth of life and asks them seriously to reflect over it. The truth is this. When a people are called upon by the force of circumstance to defend the cause of truth and uphold it for the good of men, it should behove everyone who sincerely believes in the truth

to be prepared to sacrifice everything dear to him so that the cause of truth might prevail and bring happiness to one and all. The Qur'ān gives the tiding to such devotees of truth that whatever they might lose in the struggle would be repaid to them manifold when truth shall triumph and bring peace and prosperity to one and all. "Indeed with God lies the great reward," says the Qur'ān.

History has recorded for all times the glorious manner in which the companions of the Prophet stood the test of devotion to their faith in God. It may be asserted without exaggeration that there are few parallels in the annals of man to the devoted support that they offered to the Prophet in his struggle in the cause of truth. They sacrificed all that they had for the love of God, with the result that they reaped in return what the pursuit of goodness always offers for the benefit of man.

But what is our position to-day? Are we prepared to scrutinise our lives in the light of this verse of the Qur'ān.

Verse 26 refers to the battle of Ḥunain in the eighth year of the Hijra, when soon after the conquest of Mecca, the tribes of Hawāzin and Thaqīf in co-operation with the tribes of Bani Naḍīr and Bani Hilal attacked the Muslims. The Prophet issued forth from Mecca into the valley of Ḥunain. In this engagement the Muslims were thrice in number. Naturally, therefore, they felt confident of success. But when the hour of trial arrived, their superiority in numbers could not avail. It was only a handful of staunch adherents of the Prophet, who, inspired by the example of their leader, saved the situation and won the victory for the Muslims.

The Muslim force had to proceed through a narrow pass. The enemy force lay in ambush awaiting the Muslims to enter this pass. They knew that among the Muslims nearly as many as two thousand were new converts from Mecca. A good many of these were allies of the enemy. The moment

the Muslims moved into the narrow defile, the enemy force showered arrows over them from their bows. It was a sudden attack. A large section of the Muslim army took to their heels in a state of alarm. The situation seemed clearly to go against the Muslims. It was at this juncture that the Prophet asked 'Abbās, his uncle, to cry out to his old comrades of Samra who had sworn allegiance to him at the time of the treaty of Ḥudaibiya to steady themselves. The cry inspired a new courage in the hearts of the staunch among them who forthwith returned to the Prophet and gave so stiff a fight to the enemy that they had to suffer a defeat at the hands of the Muslims.

This incident was a great eye-opener for the followers of the Faith. It brought home to them that mere numbers do not bring victory. The strength of numbers does contribute to success in warfare. But success does not always depend upon numbers. It is the strength of will and the determination not to yield which ultimately count and help even a small band of determined fighters to rout a force many times stronger in numbers. The Qur'ān addressing the Muslims points out that there were occasions in the past when though they were few in numbers they had achieved victory over the enemy. But that now at this hour in Ḥunain when they prided themselves over the largeness of their numbers, mere numbers did not avail. That was a matter for them to reflect over.

In verse 28 the Qur'ān reverts to the order issued in an earlier verse of this chapter prohibiting the polytheists to enter the Ka'ba any further. That House of Prayer had been raised by the Prophet Abraham and his son Ismā'īl for the worship of God, the One, and was meant to serve as a centre of spiritual activity for those who believed in the unity of God.

In this verse the reference to the uncleanliness of the polytheists is not to their physical condition but to the

uncleanliness of their hearts. Islam does not regard the person or the body of anyone as unclean. Every man as man stands on the same footing as every other human being. It is why it has prohibited untouchability and does not single out any section of humanity as untouchable. In fact, it is clear from the recorded history of the Prophet that the Prophet maintained social relationships with not only the People of the Book, the Jews, but with the polytheists of his time. He used to dine with them and accept their invitations and also offer invitations to them. History has even recorded that he at times had allowed them to stay in his own mosque at Madina.

The verse under reference has a limited application. It applies to the seat of Ka'ba alone and not to any other Muslim place of worship. In fact, after the issuing of this order, the Prophet had allowed the Christians of Yemen and the polytheists from Ṭā'if to stay in his mosque.

[20] They who have believed in God
and abandoned their homes for the sake of God
and striven with their possessions
and their persons in the way of God,
shall rank high in the estimation of God.
These are they who shall attain success (in life).

[21] Tidings of mercy doth their
Lord send them and of His good pleasure and
also of gardens in which lasting
joys shall be theirs.

[22] Therein shall they abide for ever.
Surely (for such people)
there is a great reward from their Lord.

[23] O Muslims! Do not take your
fathers or your brothers for friends
if they prefer unbelief to belief; and
whoso of you shall take them for friends

they shall be regarded as those
who have been unjust to themselves.

[24] Say (to the Muslims, O Prophet!):
If your fathers and your sons and
your brothers and your wives, and
your kith and kin and the wealth that
you have acquired and the merchandise which
ye fear may not have a proper sale, and
the dwellings of which you are very fond, be
dearer to you than God and
His Apostle and striving in the way of God,
then, wait until God disclose what
He wills to do. And it is not in the
manner of God to guide the impious.

[25] (O Muslims!) This is a fact that
God had helped you on many a previous
occasion (when you were few in number)
and on the day of Hunain, when despite
the strength over which you had exulted, availed
you not, and the earth with all its vastness
had straitened on you and you had
to turn back in flight.

[26] It was then, God infused into
the Prophet and those faithful (to him)
the spirit of steadiness and self-assurance and
succoured them with unseen hosts and
defeated the unbelievers, and that is what
the unbelievers deserved.

[27] Yet after this, God will turn in mercy
towards whomsoever He pleaseth;
for indeed God is Forgiving, Merciful.

[28] O ye Muslims! Surely those
who ascribe partners to God are an unclean lot.
Let them not after this year approach

the Holy Place of Prayer, and if
(due to lack of opportunity to profit by
trading with them at the time of Ḥajj)
you apprehend poverty, (then,
do not lose heart for), God, if He please,
will soon give you riches out of His abundance.
Verily, God knows (your needs) and
He will in His Wisdom compensate
you for your loss.

SECTION 4: VERSES 29–40

Verse 29 gives permission to the faithful to fight the Jews of Arabia and the Christians of Syria in the same manner as they were to fight the polytheists of Arabia. It is this verse which forms the basis of the levying of *jizia*, the details of which are given in the last note of this chapter.

Since the Qur'ān has now turned to the People of the Book, attention is drawn in the subsequent verses upto 35 to the spiritual lapses of the Jews and the Christians and it announces the tidings that the call of the Qur'ān will eventually triumph in the land. The subject will receive fuller treatment in the last note of this chapter.

Now that the House of Ka'ba had been cleared of all impurities that had gathered there during the pre-Islamic period, it seemed necessary to set at rest all speculations inherited from the pre-Islamic days in regard to the exact period during which the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba was to be performed. For a fuller view of it refer to the note given at the end of the chapter.

It has been already noted that the remaining verses of this chapter deal with the Prophet's expedition to Tabūk. In dealing with this subject, the Qur'ān offers here and there directions and advice on a variety of themes touching human welfare.

Tabūk lies on the way to Damascus about 610 kilometers from Madina. In the ninth year of the Hijra the Prophet received the information that the Roman Emperor had issued from Constantinople an order to his army to march on Madina and that the Christian tribes of Arabia were to join the Roman forces. This is the first occasion in the history of the Muslims when a foreign power ever thought of attacking the Muslims. The situation was fraught with danger and the Prophet had to make the necessary preparations to meet it. Then an announcement was made by him that the Muslims would have to issue forth from Madina to meet the enemy.

When this announcement was made, the position of the Muslims was by no means assuring. Only a few months back they had had the engagement of Ḥunain and were still in a state of exhaustion. A little before this battle they had to exert themselves to conquer Mecca. The success at Mecca had suddenly increased their numbers. The material resources available to them to look after the material needs of one and all were limited. This lack of adequate material resources was a matter of serious concern for the Prophet and then it was the season of intense heat in which the Muslims had to leave their homes and proceed on their expedition. The time of harvest also was drawing nigh. Besides, the Muslims were to cross into a foreign territory where they had to pass as many as fourteen stages to reach their destination. Such was the combination of adverse circumstances which went to disturb the minds of the Muslims ordered to march forward. But the hour was critical. In a moment of crisis such as this when the very security of a people was at stake, no sacrifice was too great to bear in defending themselves against an unprovoked attack by those who would not wish them to live a life of their own. The path of duty is not an easy way to traverse. Obstacles of diverse sorts cross it, but they have to be met and overcome with resoluteness if any abiding security of life and honour has to be gained.

In the following verses, this great truth of life is brought home by the Qur'ān to the Muslims who were now called upon to defend themselves against a powerful foe.

How did the believers, the staunch in faith, respond to this call of the hour? History has recorded their reply. Briefly, it is this. Nearly thirty thousand Muslims had issued forth in the company of the Prophet to meet the Roman army. The ideal of sharing one's substance or wealth with others in need or of spending one's earnings for the good of the community as a whole, which the Qur'ān had enjoined on the Muslims to keep in view, had by now seized the minds of the Muslims, so much so, that while a rich person like 'Uthmān, the future Khalif of Islam, offered to the Prophet nine hundred camels that he possessed at the time, a poor labourer, Abu 'Aqīl Anṣāri, who having watered the field a whole night had secured but two seers of grain, rushed forward to lay his earning before the feet of the Prophet. It may be stated that when Abū Bakr, father-in-law of the Prophet and the future Khalif of Islam, gave away all that he had with him including even the buttons of his shirt, the Prophet turned to him to ask: "What have you left for your wife and children?" His prompt reply was: "God and His Prophet!"

Since the preparation for war was undertaken in a state of very acute economic depression, it has come to be known as Jaish al-'Usrat, the army in straits.

In verse 39, as in several other verses, the Qur'ān has served a warning to the Muslims to the effect that should they ever as a community or nation fail to discharge their duty laid on them as a community, the law of God will have its inevitable course by replacing them by another community which shall have the talent to fulfil it. History will bear out how often the truth advanced here by the Qur'ān has demonstrated itself in the life of nations.

God in His Wisdom has fixed a way of life or principles

of conduct for communities of human beings or nations even as for individuals by following which they may live a life of happiness and survive in the struggle of existence. It is in accordance with this scheme of things that nations rise and fall. The Qur'ān points out that even as in the case of individuals, communities of man have to develop in them the urge for cultivating such talents as shall help them live a life of usefulness or engage themselves in activities useful to life. Only that community survives in the struggle of life whose activity proves useful not only to the community concerned but to humanity as a whole. So the community which does not fulfil this basic condition of existence, is not entitled to survive, and is soon or late replaced by another which can fulfil this function better. Such is the principle of survival at work in life.

Verse 40 recollects the event of the Prophet's migration to Madina, a reference to which has already been made in the chapter, 'Spoils of War' (verse 30) when all the Arab tribes dwelling in Mecca had resolved to deal a consolidated attack on the Prophet when the revelation came to him that he should leave Mecca and seek shelter somewhere else. At that hour the Prophet accompanied by a single companion, Abū Bakr, repaired to the cave of Thaur, a hill lying about six miles from Mecca. He stayed there for three days and then moved on to Madina. The enemy had pursued the Prophet to the place of his refuge but could not get hold of him.

Abū Bakr was intensely devoted to the Prophet. What moments of anxiety he must have passed through in his concern for the safety of the Prophet can be imagined only by him who has himself felt the touch of love. The Prophet lay in hiding in the cave. The enemy was intent on finding him out. Every moment was a moment of intense fear. In fact, at one stage he could overhear the sounds of the movements of the enemy close by. Abū Bakr, no doubt, was certain that God would protect the Prophet. But the demands of love would not allow him

at the moment any peace of mind. The Prophet noticing this state of agony in the mind of his companion went on allaying his fears saying: "Do not grieve; God is with us." At one moment when the enemy pursuers had come very close to the cave and Abū Bakr whispered to the Prophet; "If any of us two should raise himself even to the slightest degree, the enemy will catch sight of us:" The Prophet said quietly: "Why think of us two? God Himself is with us, the third." (Anas in *Bukhārī* and *Muslim*). The Qur'ān adds that God eased his (Abū Bakr's) mind. The Prophet's own mind was at rest already.

[29] Make war upon such of the People
of the Book as do not truly believe in God,
nor in the Last Day nor regard as
forbidden, what God and His
Apostle have forbidden, nor profess
the right faith, until they humiliatingly
pay the tribute of *jizia.*

[30] The Jews declare 'Uzair to be God's son
and the Nazarines declare the Messiah
to be God's son. Such were the statements
made by similar unbelievers gone before.
The malison of God on them!
Whither are they tending!

[31] They take their priests and
their monks and the Messiah, son of Mary
for Lords beside God, although they had
all been enjoined to worship one true God.
There is none worthy of worship
except He. He is far above those
who have been set up as His peers.

[32] Their ardent wish is to blow
the light of God, but God is intent on letting
it glow in full, however much
the unbelievers may dislike it.

[33] He it is Who hath sent
His Apostle with Guidance and the true
religion, that He may let it prevail over
what others have regarded as their religions,
although the polytheists may not like it.

[34] O Muslims! Of a truth many of
their teachers and the monks
(from among the Jews and the Christians)
wrongly appropriate others' property
and turn others from the way of God.
But to those who hoard up gold and silver
and do not expend them in the way of God,
announce tidings of a grievous chastisement.

[35] On the day of their punishment
when their wealth shall be heated in
hell-fire and their foreheads and their sides
and their backs shall be branded therewith,
(it will be said to them) "This is
what ye had treasured up for yourselves;
taste then your treasures!"

[36] Twelve months (for a year)
is the number fixed by God in His scheme of
things since the moment He created the
heavens and the earth. Of these four are
declared sacred, (viz., Rajab, Dhiqa'da,
Dhil-Ḥajja and Muḥarram, during which it was
customary to cease from mutual warfare).
That was a right arrangement. Therefore
during this period wrong not yourselves (by
initiating any warfare). But if notwithstanding
(the sacred character of these months)
the polytheists attack you, do ye also strike
them and know that God is with those
who are mindful of Him.

[37] (The unbelievers transpose sacred months as it suits them). This transposing is an interference in the traditional arrangement and is a further proof of their faithlessness. One year they declare a month sacred and another year declare it as not sacred. They replace one with the other only to make good the number of months hallowed by God but in effect to render them unhallowed. This evil way of theirs is fairseeming to them. God guideth not those who decline to follow the right way.

[38] O ye Muslims! What has happened to you that when it is said to you: "March forth in the way of God," you behave as if you are rooted to the earth? Is it that you prefer the life of this world to that of the next? (If it is so, remember that) the gains which the life of this world offers are insignificant before what the world to come has to offer,

[39] Unless ye march forth. He will chastise you with a serious chastisement, and He will certainly replace you by another set of people and then you shall in no way harm Him. (On the other hand you will harm yourselves). God hath power over everything.

[40] If you assist not your Prophet, (please yourselves!) God will assist him. You know that God had assisted him on a previous occasion when the disbelievers had driven him out (from Mecca) with only a second (by his side) and the two had repaired into a cave when the Prophet had to say

to his companion: "Sorrow not; be
certain that God is with us (and will not
let our enemies triumph over us)."
Thereupon God set his mind at rest and
assisted him with hosts such as you cannot
behold with your eyes, and the vauntings
of the unbelievers fell to the earth and the
assurance of God triumphantly
prevailed, God is Mighty, Wise.

SECTION 5: VERSES 41–48

In verse 41 the expression "light or heavy" covers every state or condition in which one finds oneself when one has to march forth in the way of God. The term is applicable to the young and the old, the one walking with swift paces, the other with slow ones. It applies also to a man who has no family to support, and to one who has a family to look after. Likewise, it applies to one who carries light equipment as well as to one who carries heavy armour. In understanding the meaning of the term, we have to follow the one which was given to it by the companions of the Prophet and their immediate successors and not to any meaning attached to it by the dialecticians in later times. The immediate followers of the Prophet interpreted the terms to mean that a Muslim should respond to the call of duty in every situation. Indeed, that is what they themselves did. When the call to march forth for any engagement was given by the Prophet everyone responded to the call whatever the situation he found himself in, except the disabled and the decrepit, who were always exempted from taking the field. Abū Rashīd Huraqi says: "I met Miqdād bin Aswad at Ḥimṣ at a time when he was just preparing himself to join those who were to march forth for an engagement. I told him that being an old man, he was exempted from service in war. Then he asked me, "What then do you mean by the Qur'ānic term 'march forward whether light or heavy.'" Ḥibbān ibn Zaid Shar'abi says.

"When I was proceeding with an army to Afsas, I noticed therein an old man whose eyebrows were hanging on his eyes. Struck by the sight, I asked him 'Has not God exempted the disabled from the military service?' He replied, 'God has commanded us to prepare ourselves to march forth in His cause in every situation,' and he repeated the term and reference given in verse 41." Abū Ayyūb Anṣāri too, as reported, takes the same view of the expression (*Ibn Jarīr*).

The verse forms a decisive injunction that whenever the *imām* or the head of the community of Muslims calls upon his following to take up arms in defence of the community, no one is exempted except the decrepit and the disabled who, in verse 91, are formally declared exempted. It was incumbent on everyone to strive in the cause of God with what all he possesses and even his life, and no excuse is admitted.

Verse 42 turns to the hypocrites in the camp who were making excuses to march forth on the expedition to Tabūk, which event eventually made it clear to the Prophet and to everyone, who truly were faithful to him and who not. The event tore to pieces all the veils of deception which the hypocrites had put on to hide their hypocrisy. It is why the companions of the Prophet regarded the revelations of this chapter as 'Al-Faḍīḥa,' or 'The Disclosure.'

Verse 173 of the chapter 'Āl-i 'Imrān' has already announced in advance that God would, in due course. make known openly who among those who had professed allegiance to the Prophet were truly Muslims and who were hypocrites. The veil of hypocrisy was lifted as time passed. The final stage was the stage of Tabūk.

It has already been noticed that when the order to march forth towards Tabūk was issued, the circumstance in which the Muslims found themselves at the moment were so depressing that a general feeling of uneasiness prevailed among all the ranks of the Prophet's following, so much so that the work

of preparation for war was rather slow. The attitude of the hypocrites was however clear. They thought that the order was a call of death to them so, they began to offer endless excuses. They knew that the Prophet was tender-hearted and so contrived in diverse ways to take advantage of it, and so it happened, the Prophet accorded to them permission to stay away. In these verses the Qur'ān points to this development in the situation. The divine idea was to make the way before the Prophet clear to him. The occasion gave him the opportunity to know exactly how he stood at the time and to distinguish between the faithful and faithless. Had the circumstances, as pointed out already, not been so depressing or were the prospects of gain from the expedition attractive, the hypocrites would not have chosen to offer excuses to secure exemption from marching forth. It was an hour of testing their sincerities, and this augered well for the future of the Prophet's mission, since they were now exposed and had no further chance of deceiving the Prophet by their hypocrisy.

Note the manner of expression in verse 43 with what affection and concern is the idea brought to the attention of the Prophet, that mercy or forbearance has also a limit set to it and the hypocrites do not deserve to be given a longer rope. The verse points out that the hypocrites while advancing their excuses tried also to impress upon the mind of the Prophet that despite any consideration of their own, they were yet willing to march forth with him. When that was the way they had adopted to hide their hypocrisy, it would have been well to take them by their word and ask them to make themselves ready for the march. Had that been done, it would have been made absolutely clear whether they were really speaking the truth.

Had they been really attached to the faith and were endowed with the requisite enthusiasm to strive in its cause with their lives, they would neither have offered excuses nor

waited for any specific command to march forth. The truly faithful would have straightaway realised, that it was the hour of duty and did not require any order from the leader to come forward to discharge it. It is only they who were not staunch in their faith who behaved in the manner these hypocrites had done.

Since the proposed expedition had to be undertaken against the onslaught of the imperial power of Byzantium which had just then dealt a defeat to Iran, the hypocrites among the followers of the Prophet were certain that the days of the Muslims had been numbered. In fact, 'Abdullah bin Ubai bin Salūl, who was the ring leader of the hypocrites, had assured the hypocrites that the Prophet would never come back alive from the expedition.

Verse 47 states that it was well that these hypocrites stayed away. Had they joined the Prophet, they would have surreptitiously spread disaffection among the faithful. But as pointed out in the previous verse, the purpose of God was to prevent such a development. Their defection was all to the advantage of the Prophet.

In the interest of the collective security of any society, it is necessary in times of emergency to keep the mischievous among them under restraint. It is why that in progressive societies or among advanced nations those who are at the helm of affairs, namely their governments, are given special powers to deal with an emergency, even to the extent of suspending the laws governing individual freedom. And this is necessary, since the mischief of even a single person can jeopardise the security of an entire nation.

The verses referred to above emphasise this principle of collective security. The activity of the evil-minded or of those whose presence in society in moments of stress and trial for the society is likely to prove injurious to its collective security, needs to be kept in check and even put down

with a strong hand, regardless of any furore that may temporarily be staged on that account. If some branches of a tree are of no use to it or have begun to retard its growth, they need to be cut down so that the tree may survive.

[41] March ye forth (O Muslims!)
with whatever equipment you have, light or
heavy, and (being the hour of danger
of security) strive with all your possessions
and your lives in the way of God.
This will bring you good if only
you can understand it.

[42] (O Prophet!) Had these people
(the hypocrites) been assured of
speedy gain and the journey but short,
they would readily have agreed to follow thee.
But the way has seemed to them long
(and so they are trying to slink),
yet they will swear by God (only to
fool the faithful ready to go with the Prophet):
"Were we able, we would certainly have gone
forth with you." They hurt their
souls (by swearing falsely)—liars
as they are, as God knoweth.

[43] God forgive thee! Why didst thou
give them a formal permission to stay
away, before they had exposed themselves
and given thee the opportunity to know,
who they were, who were truly
staunch in faith and who were mere
hypocrites seeking excuses.

[44] They who believe in God and the
Last Day will never ask thee to exempt
them from striving in the way of God

with all their possessions and their lives,
and God knows who truly are devoted to Him.

[45] Those who seek exemption are only they, who have no faith in God or in the Last Day, and whose hearts are filled with doubts (as to the upshot of the projected campaign) and in this state of doubt they feel hesitant (to reach a right decision).

[46] Had they really desired to take the field, they would certainly have got ready (with every possible equipment). But (the truth is) that God was averse to their marching forth and so made them feel disinclined to move forward, their hearts suggesting to them: "Stay ye away with those who stay away."

[47] Had they taken the field with you, they would have been a burden to you as they would have freely moved among you to create disaffection among your ranks and (mark) there are already some among you who will readily pay heed to what they say. (And so it is clear that their presence in your midst would have resulted in nothing but mischief). And God knoweth well the mischief-makers.

[48] (O Prophet!) It is a fact of which thou art aware that these people had once in the past attempted to stir up disaffection among thy following and contrived in diverse ways to make things difficult for thee till the truth was out and the will of God prevailed to their great chagrin.

SECTION 6 : VERSES 49-89

When a man has given up every regard for truth, he does not hesitate to exploit even the institutions established by religion or tradition to promote goodness among men to bear contrary results; so much so, that the simpletons or the weak-minded or ill-informed among the religious-minded easily come under his influence or fall victims to his deceit.

Verse 49 draws attention to this. It states that some of the hypocrites say that they prefer to stay away at Madina to marching forth, as it may likely subject them to temptations. But what is the temptation that they have in view? The Qur'ān does not give out what exactly they meant by it. The peculiarity of the style of expression is to throw out a suggestion and leave its exposition to the imagination of its reader. The hypocrites might have meant by the expression used, that the act of undertaking such a long journey under adverse circumstances against a powerful enemy was indeed inviting death; or they might have meant that they would easily fall a prey to the temptations of life in a new country.

It is stated in the ḥadīth that a leader of these hypocrites, Ja'd bin Qais had expressed the fear that the Arabs who by nature were fond of women might be carried away by the attractions of the damsels of the tribe of Banū Aṣfar of Syria. So, he told the Prophet that he might be excused to accompany him on his expedition and be saved of the temptation lying ahead (*Ibn Jarīr*).

It is clear therefore that the temptations meant by the hypocrites might be of this type. Such were their lame excuses, mere lies coined by them. The fact is that they were unwilling to strive in the cause of God and had to coin excuses in the name of morality. If one should reflect over, one will not fail to notice even today, that among those who profess to be men of high religious learning or leaders of spiritual orders, there are some who practise this style of hypocrisy.

By observing such a false piety they have blocked for themselves all avenues of intellectual and moral progress and of right endeavour in life, and strenuously engage themselves in keeping back their following from marching forward in life. I recollect now what happened to me in 1914. The idea came to my mind that I should invite the *'ulama* and the *mashā'ikh*, those learned in the Islamic religious literature and the spiritual leaders at the head of the spiritual orders in the country, to give a thought to the demands of advancing time and give a lead to the Muslims of the country. Despite my earnest efforts none of them responded to my call, except Maulana Mahmud Hasan of Deoband, who, alas, is now no more with us. The rest regarded my call as indeed a temptation full of mischief in exactly the same language as used in verse 49 of this chapter.

You might have read the *fatwās* issued by some of our *'ulama* of the time condemning the enrolment of Muslims as members of any political organisation in the country. The reason advanced was that they would have to associate themselves with non-Muslim women workers in the activity of these political organisations and that was the temptation or the mischief that had to be avoided. The plea was also advanced that free mingling with such women, would render them unfit to observe the congregation prayers, and this, they said, was against the dictates of piety. It may be clearly asserted that the attitude assumed by the *'ulama* is just one of the forms of hypocrisy assumed by the hypocrites of the Prophet's time referred to above.

Ponder on verse 52. The hypocrites expected the faithful Muslims to be slain in war. The Qur'ān calls even such an end as one of the two beautiful things that may fall to the lot of a true Muslim, victory or martyrdom, in the cause of God which the Qur'ān regards as the distinguishing marks of the true believer in God and observes, that such a conception of life is not easy for a non-believer to appreciate.

When a man begins to strive for any object in life, both hope and fear present themselves before him. Similar is the experience of a body of people when they enter upon any task. But the Qur'ān says that a true Muslim never allows fear to enter his mind whenever he undertakes any work, and this because, he knows that what he was attempting was in the way of God, and that God would assuredly help him to reach success. In fact, he thinks that to strive in the way of God by itself is a demonstration of his success in life. Every step that he takes in his onward march towards his goal is regarded by him as the very goal he was to have reached.

> "The traveller pursuing the path of life takes no notice of the unevenness of the road he traverses:
> Love itself is the road he has to traverse,
> Love itself is the goal to reach."

"Love itself is the goal to reach." If a man other than a believer, is to die in any attempt, his death would be taken as his defeat in his attempt. On the other hand, if a true believer dies in the cause of God, his death is regarded as his greatest victory. A true believer never feels any sense of defeat nor knows what it means. If any Muslim falls on any battlefield. he does not regard it as his failure. To enter the field by itself is his victory, although as the result of this entry, his body may be lying crushed under the weight of a thousand bodies. It is why he does not meet with death. When he moves forward in the way of God. his very death is life to him. But this is not easily understood by the generality of mankind.

The Qur'ān has repeatedly emphasised that the only objective that a believer in God has to keep before him is the upholding in every sphere of activity of the truth which God has delivered to man. The Qur'ān styles this striving as *Jehad*. It makes it clear that such a striving is intrinsically superior to every other form of striving which man may

attempt in life. When a man pursues this path, the question of any set-back does not arise for him. Every step that he takes along this path is a sign of victory, although such a step may mean death to him. It is why the Qur'ān says that for a believer even death is one of two beautiful things that he achieves in his striving in the way of God, victory or death. Some commentators who could not comprehend the real significance of the expression have taken it to mean 'death or spoils of war.' The Qur'ān never regards spoils of war as anything worthy of man to care for.

The chapter continues upto verse 89 to deal with the behaviour of the hypocrites of Madina prior to the starting of the expedition to Tabūk, and refers to what happened to it, during its onward march and on its return. It closes with various commandments that had been issued to them in regard to their future. The entire subject is reviewed in detail at the end of the chapter.

The question of the distribution of the *zakat* or the poor-due is also discussed at length in the note at the end of the chapter.

[49] Of these (hypocrites) there are some who, individually say (to thee): "Allow me to stay and do not expose me to any temptation (of a future happiness)." Mark! Is not their present behaviour (to shirk duty and seek comfort at home itself) a form of temptation into which they have fallen. Hell will certainly get round these faithless people.

[50] If success betide thee it will grieve them ; (on the other hand) if a reverse overtakes thee, they will say to themselves : "We were careful to protect ourselves in advance," and turn away rejoicing.

[51] Say: "Nothing will befall us except what God hath destined for us. He alone is our Protector and on Him alone shall the faithful repose their trust."

[52] Say (to them): "You are simply waiting to see which of the two things will befall us, both of which are excellent (and are equally welcome to us—defeat which allows us to lay down our lives to God, and victory which will help us to continue our service to Him). We will but wait to see that God will chastise you whether directly by Him or through us. So you wait and surely we shall also wait with you."

[53] Say: "Whether you make your offerings willingly or unwillingly, it cannot be accepted from you. because, you have grown into a type of people who should be regarded as wicked."

[54] And nothing hindereth the acceptance of their offerings except the fact that they do not believe in God and His Prophet and do not go to prayer except with sluggishness and do not make their offerings except with reluctance.

[55] Let not therefore their riches and their children cause thee amazement. Even by means of these, God is minded to chastise them in the life of the world (and this is manifest by the unhappiness they feel over the offerings they have had to make, much against their will, hypocrites as they are, and by the unhappiness caused to them by their children

coming forward, heedless of their parents, to support this cause of God and His Prophet), and to let their souls depart from here in a state of unbelief.

[56] And they swear (by God) that they are indeed of you, while they are not of you. But they are a people who indeed are simply perturbed.

[57] (Their mutual state of mind due to their fear and hatred of the Prophet is so strained at the moment that) if they find a place of refuge for them such as a cave or a similar hiding place, they will assuredly repair to it and even rush to it.

[58] Some of them even defame thee in connection with the distribution of *ṣadaqāt* or alms (by saying that thou art partial). If they be given some of it, they are pleased; but if they be not given some of it, they fall into a fury (against thee).

[59] How well would it have seemed if they had felt satisfied with what God and His Apostle had allowed them and said: "God sufficeth us. God will of His favour grant us much and so will His Prophet, and verily to God do we supplicate!"

[60] Alms (which here signify *zakāt* or compulsory levy by the state) are meant to be given to the indigent, and those in some temporary distress and those who are appointed to collect the alms, and to those whose hearts are to be won, and to the slaves seeking redemption, and to those burdened with debts (and not in a position to

repay) and to those striving in the way of God, and to the travellers who are stranded. This is an ordinance from God, promulgated in His Wisdom knowing (as He does the plight of those in need).

[61] And among these (ho[illegible]crites) there are some who wish to anno[illegible] Prophet (by their slander). They say [illegible] he lends an easy ear to one and all. Say (to them, O Prophet !) : "He lends his ear to everyone for your own good (and he never listens to anything that is not true) and he believeth in God and also trusteth the word of the believers, and is a mercy to such of you as believe. And they who wish to annoy the Apostles of God shall suffer a grievous chastisement.

[62] (O Muslims !) They swear by God just to please you, but were they true believers, they would have considered it more appropriate to please God and His Apostle (by their righteous living).

[63] Do they not know that for him who opposeth God and His Apostle, there awaiteth hell-fire wherein he shall have to abide ? No ignominy greater than this (can ever befall anyone).

[64] The hypocrites are afraid lest a full chapter of the Qur'ān should be sent down concerning them, to lay bare before them what exactly lieth in their hearts. Say (to them) : "You may go ahead with your jesting but (rest assured that) God will certainly bring to light what you are afraid of."

[65] And if thou (O Prophet!) ask them why is it that they jest at thee, they will surely say: "We were just amusing ourselves in a light talk." Say: "Do you amuse yourselves at the expense of God and His revelations and His Apostle?"

[66] Offer no excuses! For certain, you have gone back upon your word of faith. We may forgive some of you (for having repented): but some We will have to punish since they have been the real offenders.

[67] The hypocrites, whether men or women, go but one way. They enjoin what is evil and forbid what is good, and are close-fisted (in the matter of spending anything in the way of God). They have neglected to be mindful of God and so God has left them in neglect. Indeed the hypocrites have overstepped the bounds of uprightness.

[68] God holdeth out to the hypocrites, both men and women, and also those who have discarded (the message of God) the prospect of dwelling in hell-fire, a punishment adequate in itself! God has laid His malison on them and there shall be an abiding disquiet for them.

[69] (Ye are) like those who flourished before; mightier were they than you in prowess, and possessed greater wealth than you and a larger progeny. So enjoy your share of the good things of life even as they had enjoyed their own share of them, and you prattle as they had prattled before you. Their works bore no fruit in this world and will

bear no fruit in the next. Such are they who really have gained nothing.

[70] Have they not heard of those who had gone before them—of the people of Noaḥ, and of 'Ād and of Thamūd and of the people of Abraham, and of those who had dwelt in Madian and of the cities uprooted? Apostles came to them with clear proofs (of their mission) (but they did not pay heed to them and so they suffered). It is not the way of God to harm any people but it is they only, who had harmed themselves (by their wrong living).

[71] The faithful, men and women, are friends one to the other; they enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil; they observe prayer and pay the poor-due, and they obey God and His Apostle (in every state). Soon will God have mercy on them. Verily, God is the Source of Power and Wisdom.

[72] To the faithful, both men and women, God promiseth gardens wherein flow streams and wherein they shall abide, as also goodly mansions fixed in the midst of perpetual greenery. And what shall be of the highest value to them is the approbation of God, that shall be vouchsafed to them. This indeed is the highest bliss attainable (for the faithful).

[73] O Prophet! Strive against the infidels and the hypocrites and be strict with them (for, they have gone too

far in their treachery. It would be disastrous if they are tolerated any further). Their ultimate destination is hell—a very trying destination indeed.

[74] They (hypocrites) swear by God that they never said any such thing. In fact, they did use the language of infidelity and reverted to unbelief after having accepted Islam. (They did this because) they could not effect what they had planned. And this is how these people returned thanks for the riches, which God and His Prophet had afforded them out of His Bounty. If they repent even now, it will be better for them. But if they turn back (into their former way of life) God will chastise them with a grievous chastisement in this world as also in the next, and they shall not have on the earth any friend or helper.

[75] Some of them had pledged with God, "If God gives us (wealth) out of His Bounty, we will certainly give alms and live righteous lives."

[76] But when God vouchsafed them (riches) out of His Bounty, they felt disinclined to give away anything out of it and turned away (from their pledge).

[77] So God made this hypocrisy of theirs to cling to their hearts, till the day when they shall meet Him, because they have failed their promise to God and had lied.

[78] Know they not that God is aware of their secrets, and their whisperings (among themselves) and that God knoweth well what is kept hidden.

[79] God scoffs at those, who scoff at such of the faithful as have the means to offer alms freely, as those also, who, for lack of means offer instead their services—for them awaiteth a painful chastisement.

[80] (O Prophet!) God by no means will forgive these people whether you ask, or ask not forgiveness for them, or even when you ask forgiveness for them seventy times. This because they have wilfully turned away from God and His Apostle. Surely, God doth not guide those who have turned away from the right path.

[81] They who (would not join the expedition), much against the wishes of the Apostle of God, feel delighted that they were left behind. They were averse to striving in the cause of God with their possessions and their lives. They had spoken to each other: "Let us not march out in this hot weather." Say to them (O Prophet!): "The fire of hell is fiercer in heat." Had they understood this (they would not have delighted over their present defection).

[82] Let them therefore laugh a little, but they will have to weep much, as a return for what they had wrought.

[83] If God bring thee back (safely) and if some of them ask thy leave (on any future occasion) to take the field, say: "By no means shall you ever take the field with me, and by no means shall you fight the enemy by my side: you were very happy to sit at home, when you were called before, and now you are free to sit at home with those who may choose to lag behind."

[84] (O Prophet!) Never pray for any one of them when he dieth nor stand at his grave, because these people have declined to obey God and His Apostle, and will die in a state of transgression.

[85] Let not their wealth and their children astonish thee, for, it is through them that God would cause them pain in this world. Their souls shall depart from them while they are still in a state of infidelity (towards God).

[86] Whenever a Divine Command issueth forth to be faithful to God and to go forth to war with His Apostle, such of them as are possessed of riches, demand exemption and say; "Allow us to stay away with those who have to sit at home."

[87] They prefer to stay away with those who have to sit at home, which shows that their hearts are sealed and they are incapable of understanding (what is really good for them).

[88] But the Apostle and those, who share his faith strive in the cause of their faith, with their possessions and their very lives; it is

for these alone that all good things of life await, and these are they who shall prosper.

[89] God hath provided for them (in advance) gardens, wherein flow streams and wherein they shall abide; that indeed is a blissful achievement.

SECTION 7 : VERSES 90-93

From verse 90, the Qur'ān turns to another section of the Prophet's followers among whom also there were both hypocrites and the weak in faith, namely the bedouins or the nomad tribes of Arabia, a large number of whom had been newly converted to Islam. Because of their unsettled life, the new converts among them had not as yet been properly schooled in the Islamic way of living. When the call to join the expedition to Tabūk went forth, some of them came to the Prophet, only to offer excuses for staying away. The remaining did not take the trouble of coming at all even to offer excuses. Those who sought exemption were of the tribe of 'Āmir bin Ṭufail. Their plea was that should they come away to join the expedition, bedouins of Ṭaiy would carry away their cattle and their children (*Ibn Jarīr*).

There is nothing more surprising than to seek a sudden transformation of a wild people given to intemperate ways of living into an orderly society, everyone of whom vying with every other to sacrifice everything in the cause of an ideal. Such was the transformation wrought by the Qur'ān within a brief period of time. It has already been observed that the Tabūk expedition was launched under very adverse circumstances. So general was the depression among the followers of the Prophet, that the Prophet had to go through a revelation questioning their sincerity of faith. But despite this general depression, everyone of the faithful was anxious to accompany the Prophet in his expedition; so much so, those who were ultimately ordered to stay away found themselves

in a state of acute agony, that they could not have the opportunity of sharing the trials of their comrades and of sacrificing their lives in the cause of God.

Verse 91 refers to the type of people, who were not to join the expedition and of whom no service could be demanded or expected, namely, the disabled and the decrepit including those, who were too old or were ailing at the time, to undertake any journey and those also, who had not the means to provide themselves with any equipment. Be it noted, that at that time the Prophet had no regular army at his command, nor any treasury out of which the expenses of the expedition could be met. In fact, everyone who joined him was a volunteer of his own free choice, and had necessarily to provide himself with the necessary equipment, and if he could, even provide some equipment for others. The Prophet announced that there was no blame on anybody if for lack of equipment one could not accompany him. Many there were, whom the Prophet could not provide with any means of conveyance. Such persons had to be necessarily left behind. But those who thus could not accompany him felt most miserable. Indeed, they were found shedding profuse tears, when the expedition had to start without them; so distressed did they feel at the moment. The Qur'ān here draws the picture of those, who were unhappy because of their inability to join the expedition, in comparison to those who despite everything in their favour, were offering excuses through sheer hypocrisy to stay away.

For the Tabūk expedition there was a considerable dearth of conveyance. For every batch of eighteen men only one camel could be assigned. The aḥādīth record, that a party of the companions of the Prophet had absolutely no means to equip themselves for the expedition. They requested the Prophet to provide them at least with some form of conveyance. The Prophet regretted that he was helpless to furnish any conveyance for them, so much so, they went

away shedding tears in profusion. So distressed were they at the moment that they came to be known as *al-bukain* the weepers, (*Ibn Jarir*). So precious or invaluable were the tears, that they shed in the agony they felt in their hearts, for the lack of opportunity, to offer their lives at the moment in the service of the faith they had loved so intensely, that the Qur'ān has given them an immortal place in the annals of Islam by recording their wailing in its pages. More than thirteen hundred years have passed since the reference to them was inscribed on the pages of the Qur'ān, it is not possible for any believer to peruse this verse of the Qur'ān, without visualising for himself the tearful eyes of these companions of the Prophet and not letting his own eyes be filled with tears.

Verse 92 points out that it is highly unmanly and unworthy of any self-respecting individual, to seek the society of women and stay at home, when the call of duty is issued to march forth in the way of God. But there were people in the camp of the Prophet, who did contrive to stay away; so insensitive did they appear to the demands of duty! The Qur'ān likens this indifference to the setting of a seal on their hearts, a simile explained already in the context of the Qur'ānic phraseology in the note under verse 146 of the chapter, 'Al-A'rāf.'

[90] (O Prophet!) Some of the Arab nomads came to you to offer excuses; praying for leave (to stay behind); while others. having gone back upon their word (given to God and His Prophet) sat at home. So, a grievous chastisement shall soon overtake those, who have thus broken their faith.

[91] It shall be no crime in the feeble and the ailing and in those, who have not the means to provide themselves (with war

equipment if they should stay away at home), provided, they are sincerely attached to God and His Apostle. No blame shall lie on those who act righteously. And God will cover their weaknesses and be Merciful to them.

[92] Nor shall blame lie on those, who (having no conveyance of their own) came to thee, that thou mightest mount them; thou hadst to say; "I can find you nothing to mount on," and they had to turn away in anguish, their eyes shedding tears in profusion, for their inability to spend anything in the way of God.

[93] Blame shall certainly lie on those who, though rich, seek thy permission to stay away. They prefer to be in the company of the women-folk, who have to stay away. And upon their hearts hath God set a seal, since they are a set of people, who have no sense of understanding.

SECTION 8: VERSES 94–100

These verses were delivered during the expedition to Tabūk. Verse 94 points out that the hypocrites were certain, that the expedition would perish and that no one would return safely. But that in case the expedition was successful and the believers returned home safely, they would come forward to offer profuse apologies for having stayed at home, and even swear by God, that their apologies were sincere. Through this verse the believers were warned that they should not be misled by their apologies. They should be told that they would be judged by their deeds and not merely by their words. After all, they should not forget that one day, they were to return to God and meet the consequences of what they had done.

As against those who lived a settled life in centres of population, the nomad tribes were by the very nature of life were an unruly folk. Such was the state of the Arab nomad tribes in the time of the Prophet. Verse 97 has a reference to them.

Verse 98 points out that among these nomad tribes are some, who had contributed something towards the preparation of the expedition. But they were not happy over what they had done. They had regarded in their own minds, that what they had given away was a fine extracted from them. They did this in the hope that when some change of fortune would befall the Muslims, they would be in a position to profit by it. They were convinced in their minds, that the followers of the Prophet were no match against the Roman army and that the day of their fall was not far off. Those who had entertained this hope, it is stated, were the tribes of Banū Asad and Banu Ghaṭfān (*Ibn Jarīr*).

Verse 100 marks out three categories of the followers of the Prophet as good types of people:

(a) Those of the *muhājirīn* (or those who forsaking their homes and belongings had migrated to Madina from Mecca to be by the side of the Prophet) who were the first to respond to the call of truth and embrace the faith of Islam. They are styled *as-sābiqūn-al-awwalūn*, or "the very foremost among the very first batch of followers." The first among this very class of 'the foremost' was Khadija, the wife of the Prophet and 'Alī, his cousin, a boy of but ten years and Zaid bin Haritha: and from among those outside of the Prophet's immediate family, Abū Bakr, who was also the only companion of the Prophet during his flight to Madina.

(b) Among the *as-sābiqūn-al-awwalūn* are included also those of Madina, who were the foremost in recognising the call of the Prophet as the call of truth and gave him shelter at a time, when the Arab society of the time was out to

give no quarter to the Prophet and were determined to assassinate him. They are called *anṣār*, or the helpers. The first band of them, who came forward to offer allegiance to the Prophet consisted of but seven persons. This happened in the eleventh year of his mission. The second band of *anṣār* consisted of seventy men and two women. They took their oath of allegiance to the Prophet, a year after. To those who composed this second band of *anṣār*, there had already come from the Prophet a preacher, Abū Zarāra bin Muṣ'ab, to explain the tenets of Islam to the people of Madina. A few of the first band of *anṣār* had accepted Islam at his hands and the rest accepted it, when the Prophet arrived at Madina.

(c) Several others also are included in the class of *as-sābiqūn-al-awwalūn*, although they came in to embrace Islam at a later stage. They are classed as such for the reason that despite the presence around them of hypocrites and the lukewarm, they were found to be staunchly attached to the Prophet. They were, however, distinguished from the rest of this class by the appellation *be-Iḥsānin* meaning those, who were staunch in their adherence to the Prophet.

It has been observed that whenever the call of truth was issued, its first stage of progress was always marked by trials and tribulations for those, who had responded to it. It had been for them a period of poverty and lack of worldly attractions. So, those of the followers of the Prophet who stood firm by his side to uphold the cause of truth in such trying circumstances deserved a higher recognition than what might be vouchsafed to others who had accepted the faith of the Prophet later. Such is the position which the Qur'ān accords to the *muhājirīn* and the *anṣār*. The appellation by which they are distinguished, namely of *as-sābiqūn-al-awwalūn* is the highest form of distinction that can be accorded to any batch of Muslims, who have striven in the cause of Islam during any period of its history.

Mark that when the Prophet standing by himself as a lonely figure, invited Abū Bakr to respond to his call he straightaway, without the slightest hesitation, rushed to his side to accept the truth that he was preaching at Mecca. Mark the situation! Here is a lonely figure proclaiming his call of the truth of life in the midst of a hostile world. The conviction of a divine urge, the urge of Revelation, was moving him to the very depths of his being, and he was looking around, to see if anyone could recognise that urge and share his conviction. It was Abū Bakr, who, regardless of his apprehensions that the entire Arab society would condemn him, rushed to the Prophet to recognise his call of truth, and resolved to stand by him through thick and thin.

Think over! When the first band of seven Madinites came forward to assist the Prophet in his mission, they knew who it was, whom they were to assist. They knew that for nearly eleven years, the entire Arab society was up in arms against this single personality of the Prophet, who was being persecuted from every side.

To assist the Prophet at such a time was to court deliberately the hatred and enmity of all the Arab people and yet, they resolved firmly to face the trial.

It is why the Qur'ān refers to this band of the Prophet's followers, *as-sābiqūn-al-awwalūn*, with tender affection. The expression is couched thus: "Pleased was God with them and pleased were they with God." In the chapter 'al-Mā'ida' the expression runs: "God will love them and they will love God." The expression is a recognition of the strength of faith, which this band of the Prophet's followers had displayed during a very trying period in the history of Islam. The expression has a meaning for the Muslims of today. This will be discussed in the last note of this chapter.

PART XI

Chapter IX

THE REPENTANCE—AL-TAWBA

(Contd.)

CHAPTER IX

THE REPENTANCE—AL-TAWBA

SECTION 12 (*Contd.*)*

[94] But when you shall return to them (from your expedition), they will come forward to offer apologies to you. Say to them (O Prophet!): "Offer no apologies, by no means can we now believe you. God hath already posted us with everything about you. For the time being. God will keep a watch on your doings and so will His Apostle. (And remember) that you shall be brought back to Him, Who knoweth alike what you may hide and what you may manifest, and that He will then remind you of what you were doing.

[95] When you come back to them, they will appeal to you in the name of God not to reproach them. Better is it that you leave them alone, for, they are an unclean people. Their destination is hell—a recompense for what they had done.

[96] They will appeal to you to be reconciled to them, but even if you be reconciled to them, God will never be reconciled to those who have acted so unjustly.

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* It is regretted that the traditional division of the chapter into sections (*ruku's*) has not been adhered to between pages 6 and 54. Sections 3, 4. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 begin with verses 17, 25, 30, 38, 43, 60, 67. 73, 81 and 90—Ed.

[97] The nomad Arabs are a very unyielding lot, and highly uncommunicative and should be taken to be incapable of appreciating the character of the ordinances of God, sent down to His Apostle (for enforcement). And God is Aware and knows (what best be done under the circumstances).

[98] Of these nomad Arabs, there are some who reckon what they give away (in the case of God) as a fine (imposed on them), and wait for some change of fortune to befall you (that they might profit by it). (They hardly know that) a change of fortune shall befall them (instead). God is Hearing (what they say among themselves) and Knowing (what they intend to do).

[99] And of these very nomad Arabs, there are some who do believe in God and the Day Hereafter and deem what they have given away (in the way of God), as a means of securing the nearness of God and the blessings of the Prophet. Indeed as means of nearness it will serve them. Soon will God admit them to His Mercy. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful

SECTION 13 : VERSES 100–110

Verse 100 mentions three categories of the followers of the Prophet, and this has already been dealt with in the previous note.

Verse 101 refers to a special group of men formed partly of the Arab nomads, dwelling around the city of Madina and partly of the residents of the city, who were adept in hypocrisy; so much so, that it was not easy to detect their hypocrisy. The verse states that such hypocrites deserve to be chastised twice—once for their being hypocrites, and the other for their being thoroughly proficient in hypocrisy.

The Qur'ān has emphasised repeatedly, that the reaction to anything done or its result, will vary according to the nature, or the character of the deed done. The result of taking a mild poison will certainly differ from the result of taking a strong poison. If the poison is deadly, the reaction to it would certainly be death. The same law is at work even in the non-material aspects of life; and in this field, vices even as virtues are classified according to the results produced by them.

Verses 102 to 105 deal with those who were by no means hypocrites, but who nevertheless, due essentially to their sloth or lack of apt enthusiasm, did not accompany the Prophet on the Tabūk expedition. So, when the Prophet returned to Madina, such people came to the Prophet to offer sincere regrets. The announcement was made that God had forgiven them, for, the door of forgiveness could never be closed by Him. The only condition is, that man should not close with his own hands the door of repentance. As the poet exclaims:-

> "Through my own weakness, I did not
> let any prayer for forgiveness
> reach even my lips;
>
> Else the door was there of forgiveness
> always open in expectation
> for receiving my prayer."

The Qur'ān states that the regret of these people was truly sincere. It being so, there was no ground not to accept it.

It may be noted that the Qur'ān had in the previous verse advised the Muslims, not to accept any contributions from the hypocrites, nor to pray for their forgiveness. It now states that contributions for distribution among the needy, may be accepted from those, who have now admitted their faults and sought forgiveness of God and also to pray for their spiritual welfare. Your doing so, will restore to them the sense of

inward peace, which had been lost to them, because of the way in which they had behaved in the past. Indeed, it will contribute to the promotion of purity in their hearts. The implications of such a gesture will be treated more fully, in the last note where the question of *zakāt* is discussed.

Verse 106 states, that there are few persons who are awaiting the announcement, whether they would be included among those forgiven. They were but three in number, namely, Murāra bin ar-Rabī', Ka'b bin Mālik and Hilāl bin Umaiya. When the Prophet returned to Madina from his expedition, these three persons came to him and expressed, that they had no reason to advance for their staying away. They simply said, that it was sheer laziness which was responsible for their stay at Madina. The Prophet asked them to await the decision of God. The decision is given in verse 117.

Verse 107 deals with the attempt made by certain hypocrites to erect a mosque with mischievous motive. The reference to this attempt is made to offer a lesson to the Muslims of the present day. The subject will be adverted to in the final note to this chapter.

> [100] Those from among the *muhājirīn* and the *anṣār*, who were the first and the foremost in accepting the faith of Islam, and those also, who had followed their noble example are the ones, with whom God is well-pleased and who are pleased with Him. He hath prepared for them gardens wherein rivers flow, to abide therein forever. This indeed is a high state of bliss (to achieve).

> [101] And of Arab nomads round about you, some are hypocrites, and indeed even among the people of Madina, there are some, who are adept in hypocrisy. Thou knowest

them not (O Prophet!), We know them.
They will be chastised two-fold, and thereafter
shall they be given over to a severe chastisement.

[102] Others there are who have admitted
their faults: they have done things which are
right. To them God may likely turn
in forgiveness, for God is Forgiving, Merciful.

[103] Accept contributions for the poor
out of what they possess, that thou mayest
cleanse (their minds of every urge for avarice), and
prepare them for purity in life, and pray
for their welfare. Thy prayers will assuredly
bring them peace of mind; God certainly heeds
(the prayers of those who pray), and knows
(what it is that works in the minds of men).

[104] Do they not know that it is God
alone, Who accepteth repentance when His
servants turn to Him in penitence, and is
pleased to approve of what they give away
in charity, and it is God alone Who
turneth (towards His servants) with
forgiveness and mercy.

[105] Say (O Prophet to them): "Go
ahead with what you have to do. God will
watch what you do, and so will the Prophet and
the faithful, and know ye that ye shall be
ultimately brought before Him Who knoweth
alike, what you do in secret and what you
do openly, and He will let you know of all
that you have done.

[106] (Apart from those who have already
repented) there are those, who await the
decision of God, whether He will take them

to task, or will turn to them in forgiveness. (Remember that) God is Aware (of what they have done) and takes decision wisely.

[107] And there are some (from among the hypocrites), who have erected a mosque in sheer mischief, and with a view to promoting unbelief, and causing a split among the believers, and affording them a place for operation, who had in the past warred against God and His Apostle. They will surely swear: "Our purpose was naught but good," but God bears out that they are clear liars.

[108] (O Prophet!) Never step into it. More worthy for you to enter is that mosque, the foundation of which has been laid in piety, from its very first day (where you can lead the faithful in prayer), and to which repair those, who aspire to purity; and God indeed is pleased with those who purify themselves.

[109] Who of the two is better, he who hath raised his building on the thought of God and desires to please Him, or he who hath raised it, on the brink of a crumbling bank, which is bound to drag him into the fire of hell? Surely God doth not guide those who commit excesses.

[110] This building of theirs, which they have built will not cease to cause uneasiness in their hearts, until their hearts are torn to pieces, (for they will realise that the device, which they had adopted to create dissensions among the faithful, could not succeed, and consequently be subject to their never-ending

fear and depression). God surely knows
(what passes in the minds of men) and
acts wisely.

SECTION 14 : VERSES 111–118

Verse 111 states what the love of faith should signify. To repose faith in God amounts to handing over to God all a person has, his very life and his wealth. Nothing thereafter is regarded as his own. It is all God's and has to be spent in His way. Says a poet: "Thy servants, in the love of their Master, give away the comforts of this world and of the next in their yearning for Thee."

In return, these lovers of God receive abiding joy. In other words, it is a matter of transaction between God and His lovers or those who love Him. Hereafter no one, who has sold away his things, shall have the right to claim them back; similarly, he who has purchased cannot withhold what he had offered in return. The statement expressed, though in the form of a transaction, is intended only to show how greatly is God, mindful of the abiding happiness of man. The verse does not state, that the believers have offered to sell away all that they had to God. On the other hand, it states that it is God Who has purchased all that the believers had. The initiative is God's and not that of the believers. This shows that it is He, Who had desired to purchase what the believers have, although God is far above any need, and has no needs of His own to attend to. In fact, what He has purchased is in reality, what has truly belonged to Himself, and what He has duly returned, is such that none else can offer.

Verse 112 occupies a very important place in this chapter. It points to the leading qualities which a true believer has to develop in him. It classifies them under the different qualities which they have to imbibe and assigns to each the rank one occupies in the estimation of God. They are :

(a) *At-tā'ibūn* or those who sincerely feel penitent over the lapses, they may have fallen into in their life, and seek in absolute humility the grace and forgiveness of God.

(b) *Al-'ābidūn* or those who are strenuously engaged in the services of God, and have no thought of doing anything which may not please Him.

'Ibādat is of two kinds One is what is prescribed in the form of prayers at stated hours. This is to be discharged with the utmost sincerity. The other form of *'ibādat* is to develop in man the sense of God, so that all that one may think or do, should assume the form of true devotion to the high purposes of life.

(c) *Al-ḥāmidūn* or those who both in thought and expression extol the praise of God. The thought has to take the form of an earnest pondering, on the magnificent working of the universe, and on the force at work therein, and on the beauty and harmony which the divine scheme of things displays every moment. Such a thought necessarily finds expression in the praise of the Source of all being.

(d) *As-sā'iḥūn* or those who undertake journeys, in the way of God in accordance with the Qur'ānic advice: "Travel in the land that you may draw lesson from the lives of those nations who have passed away," (3 : 137). The terms cover also all those, who go out of their homes in search of knowledge, or to strive in the way of God, or undertake trying journeys both by land and sea to perform Ḥajj.

(e) *Ar-rāki'ūn-as-sājidūn* or those who bow and bow down before God, to signify their utmost submission to God both mentally and physically and by speech.

(f) Those who enjoin the good and forbid the wrong, or those who are not content with reforming themselves but strive to reform others, and regard maintenance of justice and its publicity as a matter of duty with them.

(g) *Al-ḥāfizūn-le-ḥudūd-Allāh* or those who try to protect the boundaries or the lines of conduct, which God has fixed for the right conduct of man. By the term *ḥudūd-Allāh*, the Qur'ān means all those duties and rights, which are assigned to both individuals and communities. These are to be safeguarded, for the reservation and progress of society.

The above are altogether seven qualities, which in the order they are given, mark the stages, by which the mind of man has to achieve purity for himself, both in thought and action.

Whenever a man chooses to take his first step on the road to goodness in life, that step will be one of frank admission of the unfortunate lapses, into which he had fallen before, and of sincere regret over what had been done, and a simultaneous resolve to live a better life by turning to God with all his heart and seeking His help and guidance, in the life lying ahead of him. The first step is, therefore, one of repentance and seeking forgiveness, which leads to the next stage in his march onward. That second stage is one of willing devotion to God by constant remembrance of Him. This leads to the next stage, where he begins to ponder on all that God has created in the universe around him. This is a stage where he tries to probe the reality of things, and where, whatever the extent of the knowledge that he gains, he is struck with awe and admiration exclaiming, "O my Lord! All this, Thou has not created in vain." (3: 191)*

Should he reach this stage, the next one dawns before him, where he will develop the urge to extend his interest in his life, of his family and friends at home, and to go beyond the circle about the world at large, and take a wider view than what was possible for him to take before, of human life and its history.

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* See the note under this verse in chapter 'Āl-i 'Imran,' verse 191 and also 'Al-A'raf,' verse 185.

When these four stages are passed, the traveller on the road of life has equipped himself with all that he needs, to enter upon the next stage, where he bows before the Giver of his life in ardent praise and thanks. That is the stage of the *ar-rākiʻūn-as-sājidūn*, which qualifies him to enjoin the good and forbid the wrong, and be a guide in life to others. Once this stage is reached, it becomes incumbent on him to assume the duty of preserving and safeguarding the *ḥudūd-Allāh*, or the lines of human conduct, which guarantee the progress and integrity of human society.

Verse 112 has thus made it clear, that travel or going about in the land, forms a praiseworthy item of a believer's programme of life and one of the main stages, through which one has to pass to perfect one's belief in God. It was why, that in the early days of Islam, the followers of the faith spread themselves over the earth, with marked swiftness looking upon this venture, as an expression of sincere *'ibādat* or devotion to God. It is, in fact a combination of several forms of devotion, involving the leaving of one's own home, the remaining away from those dear and near, the enduring of discomforts incidental to travel; the spending of one's money at every stage, the enduring of the rigours of changing seasons, and the coming into contact with strangers. It is by facing all these trials, with steadfast devotion to duty, that one has to pass on to the further stage in this process of devotion to God.

In the chapter entitled 'Al-Taḥrīm' the Qur'ān expects the believers among women, to develop in themselves certain qualities, which should distinguish them as women, who obey God and avoid evil, who observe prayer, and who whenever occasion demands engage themselves in travel. It is recorded in the *aḥādith*, that the wives of the companions of the Prophet and the ladies of the Prophet's own family, used to take the field along with their men-folk and attend on them. How things were different for the Muslim women-

folk in later times, hardly need to be pointed out in any detail.

Several people wondered how travel might form an aspect of faith in action, since they could not catch the right significance of the expression *as-sā'iḥūn* and *as-sā'iḥāth*. They should know that the Qur'ān looks upon *hijrat* or migration as a very good act of faith, since it involves the forsaking of one's own home. In connection with the Muslim's duty to "strive in the way of God" or *jehād*, the injunction is, "step forward. whatever your equipment, light or heavy," (Q. 9 : 41). The pilgrimage to Mecca for performance of Ḥajj, which is a duty on every well-to-do Muslim, whether male or female, is a matter of travel for the pilgrim except for the residents of Mecca since, even as the Qur'ān observes, "the pilgrims will have to come for Ḥajj after covering long distances," (Q. 22 : 27). Further, the Qur'ān repeatedly advises the Muslims to travel in the land and to see for themselves, what the end was of those nations, who had gone before them. The advice is in the form of a question, "have they not travelled in the land..." (Q. 12 : 109). Further still, the Qur'ān expresses surprises at the indifference which people show to what all God has provided in the earth and in the heavens for them to ponder on. They are all signs of God, but they pass them by unconcernedly, (Q. 12 : 105). In this very chapter, the order is given to the Muslims, to stir out of their homes, in quest of knowledge and repair to the centres of learning (verse 122). In fact even travelling, for trade purposes is regarded by the Qur'ān, as an endeavour to seek the bounty of God; so much so, that even during the period of the Ḥajj at Mecca, a pilgrim is allowed to carry on business and derive profit, or as the Qur'ān phrases it, "a bounty from your Lord" (Q. 22 : 198). Such being the clear advantages accruing from travel, why should it be a matter of surprise to anyone, if the Qur'ān should have regarded the urge of travel, as one of the qualities expected of a good Muslim.

The followers of the Prophet sacrificed all bonds of relationship for the cause of truth. When their relatives disowned them and took up arms against them, the companions of the Prophet were undeterred. The field of battle gave a decisive victory to the Muslims, and the unbelievers lost their lives. Out of pity for the dead kinsmen the Muslims requested the Prophet to pray for the fallen enemies. The Qur'ān itself refers to such a precedent in the prayer of Abraham.

Abraham's prayer was, "And, forgive my father, although he was one of those who had gone astray," (Q. 26: 86). Verse 113, however, offers the answer. It states, that it does not become a Prophet, or, any of the believers, to pray for any of those amongst their own kith and kin, who had fallen fighting against the cause of truth, specially, when they knew that God had assigned hell for such people as their dwelling place. These people had for nearly twenty years, persecuted the Prophet and his small band of followers with relentless fury, and had never for a moment regretted, that they had done a wrong thing. By their very doings they had earned what they had worked for. The question, therefore, of anyone praying for their forgiveness did not arise. Further, the prayer of Abraham, for his father stood on a different footing. Abraham had raised his voice of prayer, while his father was still alive, and while he was still hopeful of his father coming round to the path of truth. The case of the opponents of the Prophet was different. Despite every earnest appeal made to them, to reform themselves and pursue the path of goodness, they had chosen to adhere to their sinful ways and died in sin.

The story of Abraham is this, as given out in the chapters entitled 'Maryam' (Mary) and 'Mumtaḥina.' It is stated in 'Maryam' that the father of Abraham was so greatly displeased with his son, that turning him out of his house he cried out, that he would have him stoned to death. At that

moment, said Abraham to his father meekly, while leaving his home in obedience to his father's order: "May the peace of God rest on you! I shall pray to my Lord to grant thee forgiveness. I know He is very kind to me." In the chapter 'Mumtaḥina' it is recorded, that Abraham had entirely cut himself off from his family. The only tie that he retained was his earnest concern for his father. "Assuredly, I shall pray God to forgive thee. There is nothing that I can do for thee except to pray God to grant thee forgiveness."

Similar was the case of the Prophet of Islam. Tirelessly did he continue to pray for those, who were persecuting him, till every hope of reforming them lasted. Indeed, on the battle-field of Uḥud, when he was wounded in the face, his spontaneous prayer to God was: "O Lord, forgive my people, for they do not know what they are doing."

It may be pointed out here that the Qur'ān praises Abraham repeatedly, for the earnest manner, in which he prayed for his father, that God might grant him forgiveness. It holds him up as an example unto others. For, to be so earnestly concerned for the well-being of his father's soul as Abraham was, and to never lose hope of his father taking to the right path, is indeed to display a nobility of mind, which only sincere faith in God can develop. What great value the Qur'ān attaches to this feature of Abraham's character, is borne out by the fact, that in the chapter entitled 'Abraham' the Qur'ān gives to this characteristic prayer of Abraham a place by the side of the prayers, which he had prayed for the rise of a race of men, who would be truly devoted to God and work for the well-being of humanity from Ka'ba, the House of Prayer, which he had raised with his own hands—prayers which God had accepted. The characteristic prayer of Abraham was, "O Lord, grant Thou forgiveness to me, and to my father, and also to all those who believe in Thee." (Q. 14:41)

The question has been mooted, whether the word 'father' used in this chapter refers to Abraham's own father or to his uncle, Āzar, who had brought him up with the affection of a father. A reference to the note given under verse 74 of the chapter 'Al-An'ām,' will throw light on what is stated in this chapter, which makes it clear that the reference is to his uncle and not to his own father.

SECTION 14: VERSES 111-118

Spiritual State—Life and Death

Verse 116 states that the kingdom of the heavens and the earth is truly God's. He it is, Who gives life to everything and causes it to die. The implication in this verse is, that God alone can offer salvation to a human being. Even as life and its growth in its physical aspect is entirely dependent upon God, so also its spiritual state. Everything is directed by His Command, and by Command is meant, the law of life which enables men to live aright, and by the neglect of which one goes the downward path.

[111] Verily God hath (so to say) purchased of the faithful, their very persons and their worldly possessions, in return for (abiding blissful life of) paradise: (on their part) they shall fight in the cause of God, and slay and be slain: and (on the part of God) the promise (of paradise) is binding on Him, even as similar promises held out, in the Torah and the Evangel and (reinforced here) in the Qur'ān. And who is there better than God to keep promises made? Rejoice then (O ye Muslims) on the bargain effected this wise. This indeed is a great achievement.

[112] Those (who have thus entered into a transaction with God) are they, who

(in penitence) serve and praise Him, who go abroad (in the cause of God), and pray to Him bowing and bowing down, who enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil, and live within the bounds prescribed by God. To the faithful (such as these), convey good tidings (of a blissful life in the Hereafter).

[113] It is not for the Prophet or those who believe in God, to pray for the forgiveness of those, who set up peers for God, even though they be near of kin, once it has become clear to them, that such people are to be the inmates of hell.

[114] (The instance of Abraham asking forgiveness for his father cannot be appropriately cited here). Abraham prayed for his father only in pursuance of a promise which he had made to him, but when it was made clear to him, that his father was an enemy to God, he pitifully declared himself clear of him, a man of understanding such as he was.

[115] It is not the way of God to accuse a people of error, once the path of guidance has been shown to them, until they are reminded of what they have to guard themselves against. Verily God is well aware of the circumstances attendant on everything.

[116] Undoubtedly the Kingdom of the Heavens and the Earth is God's ! It is He Who giveth life and causeth death ! Beside God there is no protector or helper for you.

Translator's Note

From here on follow Mawlana Azad's explanatory notes touching the closing eleven verses of this chapter. But the matter covered by these notes is so voluminous that the verses are for the sake of easy reference given at the head of the notes rather than at the end.

[117] Indeed God has mercifully shown consideration to the Prophet as well as to the refugees (*muhājirīn*) and the helpers (*anṣār*) who had followed him in the hour of distress, despite the fact that the hearts of some of them had well-nigh failed them. He hath now turned unto them over again; for, He was Kind and Merciful.

[118] (Likewise) hath He mercifully turned unto those three persons also, who had been left in suspense and who had felt that the earth, spacious as it was, had become too strait for them, and their very lives had become a burden unto them, and who now thought that there was no refuge from God except in Himself. God had turned unto them, that they might turn repentant unto Him. Surely, God is Relenting, Merciful.

SECTION 15: VERSES 119–122

[119] O Muslims! Do not grow forgetful of God, and be with the truthful, (for it is the truth which they had spoken out, that has brought them forgiveness of God).

[120] The people of Madina and the nomad Arabs, dwelling around it, had no cause to abandon the Apostle of God, or to prefer their own lives to his, for neither thirst, nor

exertion, nor hunger, should have come upon them, when they were engaged in the cause of God; nor again should they have taken any step which might prove disagreeable to the unbelievers nor any advantage, which they might gain over their enemies should be regarded by them, as nothing but a righteous act. Verily God suffereth not the reward of the righteous to go to waste.

[121] Nor again should they regard anything they give away (in the way of God) as small or great, nor traverse any valley as anything, except as something recorded in their favour, as bringing to them a reward from God worthier than what they had worked for.

[122] Of course, it was not possible for every one of the faithful, to march forth to war, and so, such of them as had not marched out, should have engaged themselves in receiving instruction in religion, so that they could on their return to their people warn them (of the consequence of neglecting their duties), and urge them to avoid what is evil.

SECTION 16: VERSES 123–129

[123] Fight the unbelievers who have surrounded you, and let them find that you are stern in your action, and know that God is with those, who are alive to their sense of duty.

[124] Whenever a *sūrā* (chapter) is sent down, some of them (among the hypocrites) say: "To which of you hath it brought increase in faith?" It will certainly increase the faith

of those, who believe and make them rejoice over it,

[125] But as to those in whose heart is a disease (of hypocrisy), it will only thicken the dirt, that there is in them, so much so, that they shall die in their state of infidelity.

[126] (Pity it is), they do not realise, that they are put on trial once or twice every year; yet, they repent not, nor do they heed to any warning.

[127] Whenever a *sūra* (chapter) is sent down (which has a reference to the hypocrites), they turn to each other and exclaim, "Does anyone suspect that it refers to any of us!" That done, they turn aside (as if they are no further concerned with it). (The fact is that) God hath indeed turned their hearts away (from truth), because they are a people, who are devoid of understanding.

[128] Now hath an Apostle been raised for you from your ownselves; your living wrongly with its consequent suffering presses heavily upon him; he is ardently desirous of your welfare; and to those (of you) who are Muslims, he is compassionate, merciful.

[129] Even then, if they turn away, (O Prophet) say to them: "God sufficeth me; there is no God but He; in Him alone do I place my trust; and He is the Lord of the mighty Seat of Supreme Authority over the Universe!

NOTE ON VERSES 117–129

Verse 117 has a reference to an earlier verse, namely 102, wherein, those who had not prepared themselves for the Tabūk

expedition in any enthusiastic manner, and had sought forgiveness for their shortcomings, had been told that they should await the decision of God. This decision is now announced. While according approbation to the Prophet, and the band of *muhājirīn* and *anṣār*, who had staunchly stood by the Prophet at the time of the expedition, a word of forgiveness is offered to the class of the Prophet's followers, who had prayed for the condonation of their shortcomings, so that they might realise their responsibilities in future and behave better.

The word *tawba* means 'to return' and with reference to the aforesaid tidings of forgiveness, it means, that God has turned again to the followers of the Prophet, to offer His grace to them. In the case of the staunch in faith and action, this 'returning' or turning again to God, signifies added favour to them, and in the case of those, who had not been so staunch and were unhappy in their mind on that account, it signifies forbearance and forgiveness.

The above verse announces the tidings of forgiveness even to those three persons, who in verse 106 had been asked to await the decision of God. They were Ka'b bin Mālik, Hilāl bin Umaiya and Murāra bin Rabī'. Ka'b bin Mālik was one of those thirty-three *anṣār*, who were the first to welcome the Prophet to Madina; and Hilāl bin Umaiya and Murāra bin Rabī' were the ones, who had firmly stood by the Prophet. in the battle of Badr. These three persons were of those, who had not joined the Prophet on his expedition to Tabūk. When the Prophet returned to Madina, several of those, who had lagged behind or stayed away, came forward to offer one excuse or other for their staying away. But these three persons had no excuse to offer, and were frank enough to admit that the dereliction of duty on their part was due to sheer sloth and laziness. It was because of this frank admission of their weakness, that the Prophet had asked them to await the decision of God. And till then, they were to have no contact with anybody in Madina,

not even with their own wives and children, so much so, that no one chose to turn to them even to return their usual Islamic greetings of *salām*. It was only after the lapse of full fifty days, when they had had enough time to reflect over what they had done, and felt further penitent, that the word of absolution or forgiveness was issued.

Of these three companions of the Prophet, Ka'b bin Mālik records his confession in some detail. Says he: "I was by the side of the Prophet in ll his engagements, and even on the expedition to Tabūk, I intended to accompany him. But one thing or other came in my way and I could not do so. I realised that I had not acted properly. When the Prophet came back from his expedition, several people came to meet him at his mosque. They numbered over eighty. I was one of them. The others explained, one by one, what exactly prevented them from joining him on his expedition. The Prophet accepted their apologies and left them to their conscience. But when he turned to me, I did not offer any apology. It was not possible for me to invent an apology. I spoke the truth. The Prophet then said to me: "You had better go, and await what God has to decide for you." I asked some of those who had assembled there. whether the Prophet had asked any of them to await similarly. They said that two others had been ordered to await the decision of God. One of the two was Murāra bin Rabi' and the other Hilāl bin Umaiyā.

"The Prophet had ordered his followers, not to approach anyone of us three, with the result that everyone of them avoided us. This was a sudden change in my life. The world around me did not look to me the same world, in which I had lived till a moment before. The two comrades of mine shut themselves up in their own homes: but I was not cut out that way. Even in this state, everyone was avoiding me, I used to stir out and attend the daily congregational prayers at the mosque. The prayers over, I used to slink quietly into a corner of the mosque. Every now and then, I did attempt to

approach the Prophet and pronounce my usual greetings in the hope, that he would reciprocate. The Prophet at times used to throw a glance at me for a moment; but every time he would turn away his face from me instantly.

"One day I stirred out of the town. When I reached the garden of Qatāda, a cousin of mine, whom I had loved the most among my relations came face to face with me, and I greeted him, but he did not reply to my greetings. I then said to him: 'Abū Qatāda! Do you not know, that I am a Muslim and deeply cherish within me the love of God and of His Prophet?' But when I repeated this pleading plaintively, he simply muttered, 'God and His Prophet know the truth.' Then I could restrain myself no longer. I burst into tears. When I was returning to the town, I noticed on the way a Copt, enquiring the passers-by who would direct him to Ka'b bin Mālik. Finding me going that way, they directed him to me. That Copt had brought with him a letter from the king of Ghassān. Approaching me, he handed that letter to me. In that letter, the king had expressed his concern at my present state. It stated, 'Your master has treated you harshly So you had better come over to me, and I shall treat you with every honour.' I read that letter and felt that here was another calamity overtaking me, a more frightful one than the calamities, that I had already suffered.

"When in this state forty nights had passed, a messenger from the Prophet came to me, to say, that I should from that time onward, keep myself aloof even from my wife. I said: 'Am I to divorce her?' The messenger said: 'No, only separation is desired; Hilāl and Murāra have also been similarly instructed.' Thereupon, I sent away my wife to her parents

"When further ten days passed, and the morning dawned after the fiftieth night, I was, after my morning prayers, taking rest on the terrace of my house, and I was still in the same state of mind as described in the Qur'ān itself, and I was feeling that even the vast earth straitened from me, and my life

itself had become a burden to me, I suddenly overheard a voice proclaiming from the hill of Sala': 'Ka'b bin Mālik! Receive the glad tidings that your repentance had been admitted.'

"Forthwith, people rushed to me from every side to offer me congratulations. One of them came rushing to me on horseback. But the voice from the hill was stronger in note than the noise of the tramping of his horse. I then hastened to the Prophet's mosque. There I found the Prophet sitting in the midst of his companions. The habit of the Prophet was to let his inward joy reflect itself in his countenance, so much so, that it looked at the moment brighter than the bright visage of the moon. We were aware of this habit of the Prophet and so we always looked at his countenance to read his mind. What I noticed was that the countenance of the Prophet was shining bright. Said the Prophet to me: 'Ka'b, I give you the glad tidings of the hour of supreme importance to you in life which has now arrived.' I enquired: 'Is this consummation of your own prescription or you have had announcement to this effect from God?' The Prophet replied: 'From God Himself.'" (*Bukhāri* and *Muslim*).

This note under verse 118 has grown lengthy. But a detailed statement such as this was considered appropriate, because of the importance of the subject under reference, and the note of admonition it offered for the guidance of the community as a whole. It is stated that this verse of the Qur'ān and the statement of Ka'b bin Mālik, had moved Imām Aḥmed bin Ḥambal to the very depths of his being, as no other verse of the Qur'ān had ever done.

The following are implications which suggest themselves for consideration in connection with this incident :

(i) Failure to discharge one's duty in the cause of one's people at a critical hour in their life is so serious a dereliction, that even a sincere companion of the Prophet as Ka'b, had to

be put to the painful ordeal of what virtually was a form of bleak ostracism.

(ii) The incident demonstrates powerfully the sense of obedience to the ordinance of the Prophet, which his companions displayed in response to his call, by showing the utmost readiness to sacrifice all personal ties in the cause of God, which the Prophet had to uphold for the good of his community and of humanity at large, or in the interest of orderliness in human life.

Reference has already been made to what Ka'b himself had recorded of the conversation, that he had in this connection, with Abū Qatāda. When Abū Qatāda had attempted to avoid the company of Ka'b in obedience to the Prophet's command, and Ka'b had earnestly pleaded with him, that he was a sincere Muslim, and dearly loved the Prophet and did not deserve to be despised. Abū Qatāda's terse reply was just this: "God and His Prophet know the truth." In this brief ejaculation is reflected graphically the picture of the mental attitude, which the entire following of the Prophet displayed towards their leader, an attitude of absolute trust and confidence in him. What Abū Qatāda meant to Ka'b was, that although he was certainly aware of the deep love, which the latter bore towards the Prophet, and that he was a sincere Muslim, of what avail was this knowledge to him, in comparison to the knowledge of the Prophet and God, which alone was true knowledge, and that when the Prophet's command was, that he should maintain no further relations with Ka'b, his duty was to obey the command unquestioningly.

Be it noted that the call of the Prophet to his followers, to act in a particular manner was not the command of any sovereign power, entrenched in military strength or legal authority. It was but an expression proceeding from the lips of a person in whom everyone had laid implicit trust. Everyone knew that it was his word and that was enough for them.

(iii) Mark here the intensity of goodwill which everyone of the Prophet's following bore to every other. The word of the Prophet ostracising temporarily three of them was obeyed by one and all without the slightest demur, but everyone of them was sorrowful over the plight of their three comrades. Everyone ardently desired, that God would absolve them of their lapses, and restore them openly to their former position in society. So, when the announcement of absolution was made, everyone vied with every other to be first in conveying the tidings to their afflicted comrades. Ka'b had not given out the name of the person, who broadcast the news from the top of Sala' but history has recorded the name of the announcer as Abū Bakr, the companion of the Prophet who was to be the first Khalif of Islam.

Programme of Education

It has been noted under verse 97 that the question of educating the nomad tribes, who had embraced Islam, and of the unsettled life they lived, permitting little chance of organising any systematic education for them, was indeed a matter of concern to the Prophet.

The subject is again referred to in verse 122. The suggestion is to organise education on some lines open to the Muslims, in the circumstances in which they were placed at the time. Of course it was not possible for everyone to undertake the task of spreading knowledge in all ranks of the then Muslim society. But it was possible to assign this task to a select band, from every constituent group or tribe composing the Muslim society of the time. Those who would compose such select bands, should stay for a time at a central place at Madina, and receive the requisite training in the art of propagating knowledge, so that, on completion of their courses of training, they should return to their respective groups, or tribes, and attend to their educational mission.

Such was the suggestion made by the Qur'ān, a suggestion which was responsible for the rise from the very beginning of a general desire on the part of the people, to acquire and spread knowledge, as freely as possible under the circumstances. It was why, that within a brief span of a hundred years, the Muslims were in a position to organise a wide system of education, which had no parallel in the earlier history of man.

The Engagement of Yarmūk anticipated

Verse 123 probably is an anticipation of the engagement of Yarmūk which followed some time after the return of the expedition to Tabūk. It calls upon the community to be rather watchful over the movements of the people of the neighbouring countries, meaning the Arab Christians and the Romans, and to be very strict in their attitude towards them.

The warning given therein, was in view of the fact, that the Romans, in particular, were a mighty power and the utmost vigilance and concentration of strength was necessary, to meet effectively their challenge at the time.

When this engagement actually occurred, it was clear that the Muslims had to contend against heavy odds. The Roman army was two hundred thousand strong, whereas, the Muslims were only twenty-four thousand, and yet the defeat inflicted on the Romans was so decisive, that the Roman power in Syria had to withdraw forever from that part of Asia.

Nature's Warning—The Process

Verse 126, although it has a reference to the hypocrites among Muslims, draws attention to a principle at work in life, a principle which aims to present to the vision of man, the picture of the tendency nursed by communities of men, to show studied disregard to the realities of life and the results which flow from it. The principle applies alike to individuals and to communities of men, and makes it clear that calamities, which overtake individuals and nations are not sudden events in their

lives, but only indicate the climax, which the reactions to the neglect of realities, gradually accumulate to express themselves eventually in a concentrated form of catastrophe. The Qur'ān styles their climax of catastrophe as *ajal* or 'the moment,' which no power on earth can ward off (vide Q. 7: 347).

The process indicated above constitutes a law of life styled by the Qur'ān as *sunnat-Allah* which the Qur'ān asserts is never altered. If a person has taken to an evil way, whether in the physical sense or mental or moral, it generates simultaneously a reaction injurious to life, so much so that unless one amends oneself betimes, one cannot ward off the inevitable result. This is the principle which holds good in the life of individuals and of the nations alike. The process is necessarily slow in as much as the principle of life at work here is to say, magnanimous enough to allow moments of respite to the offender to enable him to realise the evil of the way of life he has taken to, and retrace his steps in time and adopt a better living, so as to save himself from the inevitable result of his actions. This respite is styled by the Qur'ān as *imhāl, tarabbus* or *istimtā'*. For a fuller exposition of this principle see Vol. I of the 'Tarjumān-al-Qur'ān,' a commentary of the chapter, 'Al-Fātiha.'

Al-Tawba — A Farewell Admonition*

Imām Bukhāri has, on the authority of Barā, recorded that this *sūra* of 'Al-Barā'at' or absolution was the last of the *sūras* delivered to the Prophet. Indeed, Ḥākim has asserted on the authority of Ubai bin Ka'b and Ibn 'Abbās that the last two verses of the *sūra* were those that were delivered as the final instalment of divine revelation. But taking into consideration all the recorded traditions in this connection, it appears that the *sūra* of 'Al-Barā'at' is not the last of the *sūras*. At all events, there is proof to warrant the conclusion that verse 281 of 'The Cow' and the *sūra* 'Al-Naṣr' were delivered after the revelation of 'Al-Tawba.' Whatever the view taken of this issue, this is certain

* 'Al-Tawba' is also called 'Al-Bara'at.'

that the *sūra*, 'Al-Tawba' is among the revelations delivered at the close of the prophetic mission. The entire *sūra* and in particular the last two verses of it, may therefore be regarded as the parting words of advice.

The last two verses are addressed specially to the Arabs of the Prophet's time. They point out that the Apostle of God had come to them and fulfilled his role. He was not a stranger to them but was one of themselves. They knew him well. It was before their very eyes that he had grown from childhood into adolescence, youth and manhood, and eventually in the days of his maturity had to announce the role, that he had to fulfil in their midst as the Apostle of God. They had the opportunity to witness his trials and tribulations, as well as his successes. Everyone of them was in a position to vouchsafe categorically the sincerity of purpose which underlay everyone of his moves, or utterances and the steadfastness with which he endeavoured to uphold the cause of truth for the good of humanity. The verses lay stress on that quality of his, which should be regarded as indispensable to the proper fulfilment of one's role, as an Apostle of God and that quality was that of tender concern for the struggling humanity and of graciousness towards them. That is the quality which they could never have missed to notice in him. The verses bring out the fact that the Apostle was so lovingly devoted to their welfare, that he shared with them the sorrows and afflictions that befell them. His one concern in life was to see them prosper in every direction. And this concern was not confined to them alone but extended to all suffering humanity throughout the world.

He is hailed here as *ra'ūf* and *raḥīm* to mark his deep concern for humanity. The term *ra'ūf* is derived from *rāfat* which signifies that attribute of God, which is exercised in compassion for those, who are in the throes of some sort of suffering and partakes of the attribute or quality of mercy. The other term *raḥīm* applied to the Prophet, is derived from *raḥmat* which is again a divine attribute signifying utmost mercy. So,

when the Qur'ānic passage under reference states that this Apostle of God is endowed with the twin divine attributes of compassion and mercy, it only proclaims that the Apostle in the estimate of God, holds an eminently exalted position as a benefactor of mankind. The Qur'ānic passage makes it clear to those around the Prophet, that if they would not pay heed properly to the advice of one like the Apostle, who had striven so passionately for their welfare, the responsibility for any unpleasant result flowing from it shall not be laid at his door. He has discharged his duty scrupulously, and he seeks no reward from any one of them for what he had done. To him God is All-Sufficient. As for the message delivered through him to both the Arabs and the world at large, God will preserve it through the ages that follow to help and steady mankind and none of them can disturb it, after the Apostle had passed away.

To appreciate the object of such an advice, as given in this *sūra* of 'Al-Tawba,' we have to keep in view in the first place, the time of its revelation and in the second, the aspects of the theme presented therein.

This chapter was delivered at a time, when the whole of Arabia had well-nigh accepted the divine message conveyed through the Prophet. This development was indeed a move towards prosperity in life, which the Arabs felt assured in their minds they were bound to achieve in ever-increasing measure as time advanced. It was this sense of self-security that they had developed in their minds, which in a way was responsible for the laxity, which some of them displayed at the time of organising the expedition to Tabūk. This is probably the reason, why so serious an attention has been drawn in this chapter of the Qur'ān, to the need for the followers of the faith to be ever on the alert, to meet every danger to their collective life and keep high spirits in moments of crisis.

The admonition is meant to make the followers of the Prophet realise that the task before them had not been

completed. It was meant also to make it clear to them, that the message of the Prophet did not depend for its success or fulfilment, on any show of response from them. Should they at any time fail to appreciate it, its vitality will by no means diminish. On the other hand it is they who will have to suffer in consequence. The message has the strength to triumph for all time.

It may be stated here, that in the early days of Islam the two verses 128 and 129 explained above, gave rise to serious surmises on the part of the commentators of the Qur'ān, in respect of the period of their revelation. Some of them were of the opinion, that the very nature of their calling attention, that the need for absolute dependence on God, for the success of the Prophet's mission, partook of the character of the earlier revelations delivered at Mecca, where the followers of the faith had to live in an atmosphere of helpless uncertainty as to its future. These commentators wondered, why such a note of depression could be struck in anything delivered in an hour of success at Madina. To explain it away, they resorted to diverse devices of explanation, none of which was to the point. The explanation offered in the foregoing paragraphs should set at rest all speculation about the propriety of the two verses at the close of this chapter.

The Attitude Towards the People of the Book

In verse 29, it had been pointed out that since the People of the Book, even as the polytheists of Mecca, had broken openly the pledges given to the faithful and had become a source of great danger to their security, it had become incumbent upon them to fight them, even as they had to fight the polytheists of Mecca.

At the advent of Islam, there lived in Ḥijāz, a number of Jewish communities. The Christians were not there in any appreciable number. They lived mostly either in Yeman or on the northern frontiers of Arabia. Reference has already been made to the attitude which the Jews had displayed towards the

mission of the Prophet. The attitude of the Christians, on the other hand, was different from that of the Jews. They did not display any studied hatred towards the Faith as did the Jews. When the call of the Prophet issued forth from Mecca, they did not evince any striking opposition such as the Jews had done. They kept their minds open and were indeed sympathetic towards it. That was the attitude of the Christians of Yeman in particular. They had indeed volunteered to pay the *jizla* in lieu of military service. In fact, a deputation of them, as referred to already in an earlier chapter, 'Āl-i 'Imrān,' had waited on the Prophet, to receive clarification from him on certain aspects of their doctrinal faith as presented in the Qur'ān.

That was the bearing displayed by the Christians beyond the confines of Arabia, to whom the message of Islam had been conveyed in its early days. In fact it is stated that the king of Abyssinia, the Negus of the Prophet's time, had in his own person accepted the Faith, and about whose regard for truth, the Qur'ān itself bears testimony, (vide Q. 5 : 83). This distinction between the respective attitudes of the Jews and the Christians has been noted in the Qur'ān (vide Q. 5 : 82).

Later on, when Islam spread beyond the confines of Arabia, the Christians dwelling in the adjoining countries, which were subject to the Roman rule, began to show restlessness at the expansion of the Islamic influence, and in fact developed hostility towards it. The first result of this hostility was the assassination of an emissary of the Prophet, Ḥārith bin 'Umair, who had been deputed to deliver an epistle to Shuraḥbil bin 'Amr Ghassāni, the ruler of Mu'ta. This event was a flagrant violation of international obligations, so much so, the Prophet had to send an armed force in the eighth year of the Hijra to fight the transgressor. At the time, the Roman Emperor was camping in Syria. To him repaired the ruler of Mu'ta to seek help. The engagement that followed gave a decisive victory to the Muslims.

Then, there set a powerful reaction against the Muslims among the Christian Arab tribes of Syria. They resolved to

wage war against the Muslims and the Emperor of Constantinople promised active support to them. Within a few months thereafter, the Roman armies began to pour into Syria. The Prophet himself was obliged in consequence to take the field. The expedition organised in defence is what is known as the Tabūk expedition. But when the expedition reached Tabūk it, became clear to the Prophet, that the Romans had changed their intention to proceed against the advancing force of the Muslims. The closing verses of this chapter were delivered evidently on the return of this expedition. It was in these circumstances that the revelation had come to the Prophet, to guard himself against the Christians, even as he had to, against the Jews and the *mushrikīn* or polytheists of Mecca.

The order to fight the People of the Book is thus limited in its appljeation. It does not mean that the Muslims should fight every Jew and Christian, whenever he is found, in any part of the world till they embrace Islam or, pay the poll tax of *jizia*, as is the perverted view of the hostile critics of Islam. To suggest that Islam enjoins indiscriminate opposition to the People of the Book, is to betray ignorance of the ideology of Islam and the life of the Prophet, as also of the nobility of disposition displayed towards the Jews and the Christians by the companions of the Prophet, after his passing away and of the actual history of Islam in medieval times.

While issuing the order to fight the People of the Book, at a particular stage in the mission of the Prophet, the Qur'ān explains the motives at work in all the devices, which they adopted to thwart the spread of the idea of the Divine Unity and of good living in consonance with a belief therein. The Qur'ān refers in this connection to several prominent features of their outlook on life, which had disabled them to appreciate the truth advanced by the Prophet, and withdraw their opposition to his mission. So hardened were they, in this attitude of theirs, that there was no alternative left to the Prophet except to meet their challenge. Firstly, despite their professed belief

in the Unity of God, their day-to-day living and activity belied their profession. Secondly, they openly permitted to themselves as lawful, what had been declared by their scriptures as unlawful. Thirdly instead of making a direct approach to the simple phraseology of the scriptures themselves, they had let their scribes or doctors of religion to interpret it for them, thus allowing them to assume an authority in religion which their scriptures hardly countenanced. The cumulative result of all this was that they had to follow a way of life, which was repugnant to the way enjoined by their scriptures. This fact of their life has been already touched upon in a previous chapter, 'Al-Baqara,' wherein they are referred to as a people, who say that they believe in God and the Day-after while in reality they do not so believe (Q. 2:8).

The expression in verse 29, "till they with their own hands (or willingly) pay the *jizia* and divest themselves of their arrogance" is noteworthy. The idea is that the People of the Book should not only desist from their unmeaning opposition to the Prophet's endeavour to promote peace in the state but, in lieu of their exemption from military service, offer of their own accord monitary aid or *jizia* towards the expenses of the state which guarantees their security and welfare.

The term *jizia*, in Arabic means revenue, such as from land, as also a personal levy or tax as collected in Iran and Syria in the time of the Prophet, from the tribes of those parts of Arabia, which had been annexed to Iran or Syria. It was in conformity with this practice in vogue that the Christian deputation from Najrân, who waited on the Prophet at Madina had offered, in lieu of their embracing Islam, to pay *jizia* to the state. This is probably the first instance of its kind when *jizia* was accepted. This was followed by a similar attempt on the part of the Jews and the Magi of Bahrain.

The injunction to collect *jizia*, although issued with reference to the Jews and Christians, is a general injunction,

applicable to all those non-Muslims, who live in a Muslim State and are exempted from military service. This has therefore been the practice generally observed by Muslim States in medieval times, as evidenced by the fact that the *Rāshidīn* (the first four khalifs) collected the *jizia* from the Sabians and the Umayyid and Abbasid khalifs from the Buddhists and the Hindus of Sindh.

There was however a difference of opinion among the Muslim jurists, in the matter of collecting *jizia* from the non-Muslim Arabs. But the opinion which prevailed was to the effect that no distinction should be made in this respect. In fact, the Prophet himself had collected *jizia* from the non-Muslim Arabs. The question of polytheist Arabs, who had waged war against the Prophet, the *mushrikīn*, did not call for any prolonged consideration since they had, as stated in the chapter, come round and embraced Islam before the Prophet passed away.

Why was this injunction of *jizia* issued at all? The simple reason is this, the idea of the Prophet was not to impose on those, who would not accept his faith to share the same burden of responsibility in the administration of the State, as was naturally expected from the Muslims, whose duty it was to assure security for the State and keep peace and order in the and, and run the administration in the interest of one and all.

Islam had imposed on the Muslims compulsory military ervice, or what is nowadays called conscription, in moments of mergency. The case of the non-Muslims stood on a different ooting from the Muslims. The idea of the Prophet was not o compel them to do military service but to leave the question o be decided by them alone. They were free to undertake ilitary service even as the Muslims; but if they cared to abstain om doing so, they were expected to share in some manner the ilitary expenses of the State. This is the genesis of the institu- on of *jizia*.

Such was the respect shown to freedom of conscience, an attitude of mind, for which there was no parallel anywhere in the contemporary world of the Prophet. To take the field in the cause of the country is a trying task involving the sacrifice of one's life. It was not considered proper for any State, pursuing Islamic ideology in administration, to compel its non-Muslim population to undergo so serious a sacrifice. They were therefore given the freedom, either to join the Muslims in defending their country by undertaking military service, or meet in some form the expenses of military administration. This is clearly noted in the ordinances issued by the early khalifs of Islam. Indeed, even as the historians, Ṭabarī and Balādharī, have recorded, *jizia* was not collected from the non-Muslim population, whenever they chose to join the military forces of the State.

There is another aspect of this question which needs special attention. In accordance with the provisions of the faith, there were certain taxes, specially levied on the Muslims, taxes such as *zakāt* and *ṣadaqāt*, which were not levied on the non-Muslims. These were taxes, the benefits of which went to the needy among the population of the State irrespective of the religion they followed, The only tax that was collected from the non-Muslims was *jizia* and its payment, as explained above, was a matter of their own choice, and was paid in lieu of military service, which was imposed on the Muslims as a compulsory provision. But this needs to be noted that the benefits of the State were open to the non-Muslims, in an equal measure with the Muslims, a practice which is clearly peculiar to Islām and for which, there is hardly a parallel in any other system of corporate living.

M. Le Bon, the well-known writer on Arab civilization, has drawn particular attention to this feature of an Islamic State and observed, that despite the fact that the incidence of taxation fell more heavily on a Muslim than a non-Muslim, the non-Muslim was free to enjoy equally well with every Muslim, all the privileges afforded to the citizens

of the State. The only privilege that was reserved for the Muslims was the seat of the caliphate, and this, because of certain religious functions attached to it, which could not naturally be discharged by a non-Muslim.

The Jewish Belief Touching Ezra

Verse 30 and those following it immediately draw attention to the fact, that the Jews and the Christians had strayed away from the basic truths of their own religion.

In regard to the Jews, it is particularly observed, that they had come to regard Ezra as *ibn-Allah* or the veritable son of God. Ibn Jarir, however makes it clear that this development in the doctrinal faith was confined to the Jews of Yathrib only, and was not shared by the Jews living elsewhere. He records this on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās.

'Uzair, referred to in the passage concerned, is Ezra of the Old Testament. It is stated that the original manuscript of the Torah was burnt away in a conflagration, when Nebuchad Nezzar attacked Jerusalem. But when the Jews returned to Jerusalem, after their release from the thraldom of Babylon, no copy of the Torah in Hebrew could be made available to them. In fact, the younger generation among them could not read anything in that language. In a situation such as this, Ezra managed to re-scribe it from memory in the Chaldic script, and this was taken to be the authorised version of it. Since Ezra had thus revived the law, he came to occupy an exalted position in this period of the Jewish revival. Indeed he was accorded the honour hitherto reserved for Moses. (For further account of him, see Jewish Encyclopaedia, under 'Ezra'.) When such was the honour accorded to Ezra by the Jews dwelling in their homeland, Palestine, it should not be a matter of surprise that the migrants of Yathrib, who lived in the Prophet's time went a step further and invested him with the halo of divine dignity.

Setting up Peers for God

Verse 31 draws attention to the very source of the tendency, which the Jews and the Christians had developed of straying away from the basic doctrines of their religion—the tendency of investing their high-ranking priests with the role of divinity. They did not venture to assign to them the rank of the Supreme Overlord of the universe. But the manner of their bearing towards them was something approaching their regard for the Supreme Being. That was the view taken by the Prophet. It is recorded of 'Adī bin Ḥātim Ṭai who, prior to his embracing Islam was a Christian, that when the verse 31 was recited by the Prophet, he remarked that the Christians did not offer them the regard that was due to God. The Prophet asked him, whether their priests were not in the habit of declaring lawful, what their scripture had considered unlawful or prohibited. He (Ibn-i Ḥātim) replied in the affirmative. This the Prophet stated was akin to worship (*Tirmidhī* and *Baihaqī*). To invest priests with the authority to promulgate doctrinal law, was indeed to invest them with divine authority to promulgate law and this the Qur'ān condemned as an act of sacrilege; for such an authority was exercised only through revelation, and this, no human being can exercise of his own accord.

The idea cannot be advanced, that the Christians of the present day regard their religious leaders, such as, the pope and the bishops as peers to God, or that the Jews commit such an error in regard to their religious leaders. But the fact cannot be denied, that during certain periods of their history, they did give to them in their respective spheres, the role of authority in religious matters such as should belong only to God. This is manifest from the liberties they took in deciding what was lawful or unlawful for their followers, and who among them should be regarded as entitled to get into heaven or be consigned to hell. They were regarded as too holy to be capable of committing any sin.

The result of assigning to the religious leaders, such a serious role was suicidal to the cause of religion, which their scriptures had upheld. The teachings of the scriptures had to be bye-passed yielding place to their personal decisions in every matter. In other words, the centre of religious direction shifted from God to man. This gave rise to a set of professional aristocracy in religion, styled variously, who exploited the ignorance of the masses in their personal interests. Reason thus came to be at a discount and the voice of these self-styled religious leaders prevailed in every sphere of activity. In the Islamic religious phraseology such an attitude is styled *taqlīd* or taking everything on trust unquestioningly, thus barring from every side the exercise of common-sense and straightforward reasoning, and freely opening the door to every form of vagary in thought and action, proceeding from the exploiters of religion. Indeed this tendency in religion assumed in due course such a hideous aspect, that it impelled the ignorant masses to hail, some of them as demi-gods and even peers to God Himself in practice.

The Middle Ages, to confine our attention to the history of Europe, will offer marked instances for reflection of the very low levels to which the mind of man had been dragged down to install this ugliness in thought and action into the exalted position of religion. The institution of papacy and the reverence paid to it, to single out but one manifestation, will furnish adequate proof of this abysmal fall of man in the domain of religion.

When the voice of Islam was raised for the first time, the Christians felt reluctant to respond to it in a straightforward manner. But when though slowly but steadily, the voice persisted to reach them, particularly during the period of the Crusades, it did produce among the Christians of Europe, a ruffling of thought which eventually found its effective expression in the Protestant movement. It was Luther who first came forward to raise his protest against the vagaries of papacy. The primary issue over which this protest was raised was the question

of salvation. The question was, whether the truth of anything in religion was to be explained with reference to their holy scriptures, or the personal declaration of the pope, to wit, whether salvation depended upon one's right belief as sanctioned by the holy scriptures, or on the certificate issued by the pope. Clearly, the original clarion call of the Qur'ān "invest not your priests with the privilege of godhead," was here powerfully echoed from the very depths of the heart of Luther, and reverberated in due course from every corner of Europe.

It is this great fact of history that marks, as recognised on all hands, the beginning of the age of reason in the religious thought of Europe. The initial impulse of this movement is to be traced back to the quiet advice, which the Prophet of Islam had given to the deputation of the Christians of Najrān, that had waited on him at Madina, never to turn away from the moorings furnished to them by their own scripture—the moorings to which the Qur'ān so tenderly draws attention, in its magnanimous call issued to all the People of the Book, in a manner unparalleled in the history of religion. That call ran: "O People of the Book! (Let us not wrangle over what may be regarded as controversial subject). Let us at least agree on that which is recognised alike by you and by us, that is, that we worship none but God, and associate nothing with Him, and take not each other as Lord to the exclusion of God." (Q. 3: 64). The same note is struck even in verse 31 under reference of this chapter.

Had the first call of the Prophet been listened to by the Christians, in the time of the Prophet, it may be safely asserted that Europe would not have had the misfortune to go through the tragedies of that period in European history, which is condemned by the Christians themselves as the Dark Ages, and that the movement called the Renaissance would have begun not in the fourteenth century of the Christian era, but in the seventh century itself.

This is the story of the Christians who had been called upon to give heed to the word of truth, which had been addressed to them through the Prophet. But what is the story of the Muslims, the very people who had been charged with the duty of propagating this truth through their own lives? The pity is that even they could not escape the onslaughts of this error. Even they have meekly passed on to others, their own inherent privilege to think out things for themselves in matters of religious import, primarily in the light of the Book and the *sunna* of the Prophet. This is so, at all events, in the field of action. The result has been to throw open the door, for all those iniquities to flow in freely into their lives, the iniquities against which the door had been banged by the Qur'ān. The greatest evil which in the wake of this trend captivated the minds of the Muslims is, what is known as *taqlīd* or blind trust in the interpretation of the Qur'ānic word by its medieval commentators and jurists. This is primarily responsible for the intellectual laxity which has for centuries weakened the mind of the Muslims, and disabled them to interpret the Qur'ānic word in the context of advancing time. The latest stage is fraught with great risks to the future of those who profess lip loyalty to Islam. Having depended for centuries on the *fiqh* as framed in medieval times, and without any urge to reorientate it, in the light of the provisions of the Qur'ān, to meet the demands of life in the world of today, they have taken to another form of *taqlīd* which expresses itself in an easy attachment to the law and jurisprudence of Europe, hardly realising that the Qur'ān has the vitality to furnish them solutions to the problems of life which they have to face from time to time in their onward march in life.

CHAPTER X

JONAH—YŪNUS*

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1-10

Like 'Al-An'ām,' this chapter addresses itself to the polytheists of Arabia. The basic concepts of the divine message, viz., belief in the Unity of God, in the Revelation, in the Prophethood and in the Hereafter are enumerated here one after another.

Belief in the revealed scripture is given precedence, as this forms the threshold to divine guidance. The unbelievers find the Prophet a human being like anyone of them but with a difference. When he proclaimed the message of God, they scoffed at him, maligned him and rejected with impunity the revealed scripture, the Qur'ān and his Prophethood; but as companions gathered around him accepting his message, they were confounded at the rebounding success he was achieving in his mission. In their attempt to vindicate themselves, the polytheists were forced to confess that the revealed scripture was nothing but a product of sorcery. This imputation, no doubt served as a clear testimony of the miraculous effect the revealed scripture had on the unbelievers.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] Alif. Lām. Rā.

These are the verses of the Book
(which is full) of wisdom.

* Prof. Md. Anver of Osmania University, Hyderabad, translated this chapter in deference to the wishes of the Trust, and revised Dr. S. A. Latif's rendering of the verses.

[2] Should it be a matter of wonder
for the people (of Mecca),
when We have through Revelation charged
one of them to warn men (of the
consequences of evil living) and offer
glad tidings to those who believe (in God)
that they shall have with their Lord a
place of high rank. (How curious is it that)
the unbelievers should say (of such a personality),
"Here indeed is a veritable sorcerer !"

[3] (O ye people !) Verily your Lord is God,
Who brought into existence the heavens
and the earth in six periods (of time)
and then assumed the role of
Supreme Authority over all things.
(He being the Creator and the Sovereign)
without His permission none can
intercede with Him. Such is God, your Lord !
Therefore, serve Him. Will ye not be
mindful of Him in all that you do ?

The creation of the heavens and of the earth in six periods of time, has been explained in the chapter, 'Al-A'rāf' under verse 54 in Vol. II and a note is given at the end of this chapter also.

Mark ! When you visualise that none but God is the Creator of this universe, then why do you seek other sources and powers for providing, regulating and controlling it ? And why do you consider others worthy of worship ? There is none other than God, the Creator. His is the Lordship over all the domains of existence, and there is no peer for God. Refer to 'Al-A'rāf,' verse 54, Vol. II, pages 410-11.

From verse 4 onward the subject turns to the life of the Hereafter which is totally rejected by the polytheists. The attention of such persons is drawn to the following arguments.

(i) It is God, the Creator, Who brings everything into existence for the first time, and later He recreates. If one believes in the first creation, what makes one wonder at the creation for a second time? More details are given in verse 5 of the chapter, 'Al-Ḥajj' and in the last verse of the chapter, 'Al-Qiyāma.'

(ii) Is a second phase of creation necessary? Yes, for, the purpose of life on earth is to test our belief and actions, and a life after death is essential to reap the recompense for the record of our performance in this world.

(iii) The whole phenomena of universe and its smooth governance are not without deep significance. Look at the sun, a source of light for planets! Look at the moon, that revolves herself through twenty-four-stations in the sky! We owe our calculations of days, months, and years to them. When every movement of a heavenly body contributes to the divine scheme in a meaningful manner, why should the glorious human existence be denied its contribution and recompense? Is man born just to be merry—to eat, drink and die, and cease to exist? (Refer to chapter, 'Al-Fātiḥa,' Vol. I, pages 72-89).

Note that after every invitation to ponder over aspects of such serious import, like the phenomena of the universe, the verses generally close with clauses like, 'for those, who are men of understanding' and 'for those people that possess knowledge,' and this, because wisdom dawns on those, who possess knowledge and insight. As for the meaning of 'the stations marked for the moon' refer to the note at the end of the chapter.

In verse 7, we have a description of those persons who deny the life of the Hereafter. They possess the following qualities:

(i) They do not hope to meet God.

(ii) They are happy with this worldly life.

(iii) Their conscience does not prick and they always feel satisfied,

(iv) and their intellect has grown so morbid, that the great signs of this vast universal phenomena fail to move them.

Thus the Qur'ān analyses the mind of the unbelievers, and thus it gives an exposition of its own arguments about the Hereafter, in a style which is both marvellous and miraculous.

Let it be remembered that the Qur'ān considers the Hereafter to be a state when the creation is ushered to the Divine Presence. See also the note at the end of this chapter: and explanation for verse 10 is also found there.

[4] Unto Him shall ye all have to return;
truly the promise of God always holds good.
He it is Who issues forth a thing in creation;
then He causeth it to return to Him (after death),
so that He may reward justly those
who have believed in Him and have done
what was right. But as for those
who have declined to believe in Him,
they shall have a draught that boileth and
chastisement which is painful;
and this, because they have not believed in Him.

[5] It is He Who hath fashioned
the sun for brightness and the moon to give
light, and marked for her stations
that ye may reckon (time) and mark the
number of years (that ye pass).
God hath not created all this except
in proper form and with right intent. He
explaineth His purposes (of life and creation)
in a clear style for people of understanding.

[6] Verily, in the alternation of night and
day and in all that God hath created

in the heavens and in the earth are signs
(full of meaning) for those who
are mindful of God.*

[7] Verily, they who do not expect
to return into Our Presence
and feel satisfied with the life of this world
and are content with it, and who do not
pay heed to what We have revealed.

[8] These are they, whose abode in Fire
is Recompense of what they (themselves)
had wrought in life.

[9] But they who believe (in God)
and do what is right, shall receive
from their Lord right guidance as a
recompense of their right faith in Him.
Streams of water shall flow at
their feet in gardens of delight.

[10] Therein they will raise their voice,
"All glory be to God" and their
salutation therein shall be "Peace" (*salām*)
and they will close their prayers with
the words. "Praise be to God,
the Lord of all domains of existence."

SECTION 2: VERSES 11–20

Refer to the commentary on chapter, 'Al-Fātiḥa' and the law of Gradual Process (Vol. I, page 56) for explanation to verse 11.

[11] Should God hasten an evil on men
(for the evil they have done) with the speed
with which they rush to secure
what may be gainful to them, they

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* *Vide* Vol. II, verse 2 of chapter, 'The Cow.'

would have forthwith met with the end
marked out after them. (But this is not
the way of God. He gives the sinners
respite to repent and make amends.
It is only when the time of respite is wasted
that their evil actions inevitably overtake them.)
So, we leave those who do not expect to return
(after death) into Our Presence,
to continue to indulge in their excesses.

[12] When any affliction toucheth a man,
he crieth to Us, whether at the moment
he is lying on his side or sitting or standing ;
but when We withdraw his affliction
from him, he passeth by Us
as though he hath never called on Us
against the affliction that had touched him.
Such a behaviour on the part of transgressors
has been made fairseeming to them !

[13] How many generations
of people before you did We not cause to
perish when they had acted wickedly,
despite the fact that their Apostles had come to
them with clear proofs (of their mission),
and they would not even then believe (in the
truth advanced) ? Thus do We deal out
to the wicked what they deserved in return.

[14] It is then that We have caused you
to succeed them in the land
that We might see how you will act.

Attention is drawn in verse 12 to the instinct of a man in distress, when he turns towards a power far above him, in suppliance, but soon after the period of affliction, he reverts to his life of ease and luxury, totally forgetting that he was ever a supplicant. This unceremonious behaviour on the part of

man has often been a matter of comment in the Qur'ān. It is but natural, for one in suffering, to look up to some higher power, and man by instinct and intuition is bound to have faith in the Higher Power. Rejection and negligence are mere the result of external powers working on man. We find verse 22 reverting to the same subject, but in a different manner.

The polytheists could not question the integrity and the truthfulness of the Prophet. They repeated their willingness to listen to his word, but they said his mission was unacceptable. They wished him to forge a new scripture, whose teachings should not be repugnant to their faith and that of their fore-fathers. The Prophet declared that throughout his lifetime, he had never fabricated anything to please anyone and that he was subjected to the divine decree of his Lord in delivering the revelation of the Qur'ān, and that none could save him from the displeasure of his Lord in case he failed to recite them as they were.

Another clear testimony about his Prophethood is given in verse 16. He was not a stranger to the people of Mecca. During a long span of forty years of his lifetime, they never found him committing a single act of indecency. Most blame-less was his character, and he was always an *amīn*, the trustwor-thy. Not a word of falsehood ever escaped his lips before. How then, could he utter such a blasphemy, as to invent a lie against God saying that His Revelations were delivered to him. Could not they understand this much ?

Psychologists and moralists opine that the character of a person once moulded in the early forty years would weather any storm. The character of the Prophet had been for forty years like an open book for the opponents. It was unthinkable that he would blaspheme in his forty-first year against the Fashioner of the heavens and of the earth, before the very persons who rejected the divine message. In that case both would be implicated, one for blasphemy against God, and the other for

rejecting the divine message. Justice then had to be meted out to the culprits, and God did judge. The liars and unbelievers were wiped out for good, and the mission of Muhammad, the Prophet, spread throughout the globe. Refer also to verses, 21 and 44 of the chapter, 'The Cattle' and verse 37 of the chapter, 'The Heights.'

[15] But (O Prophet!), when Our clear
verses are recited to them, they who
do not look forward to return unto Our Presence
say, "Bring a Qur'ān different from this, or
alter some of its provisions." Say:
"It is not for me to make any
changes therein as I like. I follow only
that which is revealed to me. Indeed I
fear chastisement of the Great Day, if
I go against my Lord.

[16] "Had God so pleased, I would
not have recited it to you, nor would He
have made any mention of it to you (but His Will
is that this revelation should be received
by you, and all the nations of the world should
receive this guidance from you).
Already have I dwelt among you for years
before the divine revelations began to come
to me, (and had never said anything
hurtful to your interests, and know that what
I am now communicating to you is a
revelation from God intended to reform you
and equip you for great things in life).
Can you not understand this much?"

[17] Who is more unjust—he who
inventeth a lie against God or he who
treateth His revelations as lies?
Surely the wicked shall not prosper.

Verse 18 deals with the Unity of God. The note at the end of this chapter may be perused.

Verse 19 is similar in meaning to verse 213 of the chapter, 'The Cow,' and the subject would be discussed again in the chapter entitled, 'Hūd.'

> [18] And (these polytheists) worship,
> instead of God, those objects which
> can neither help them nor harm them and
> (by way of reasoning) say: "These are
> our intercessors with God." Say to them:
> "Do you apprise God of aught in the
> heavens and the earth which (you fancy)
> He knoweth not? Glorious is He!
> Exalted is He, far above those whom
> they have set up as peers!"

> [19] Mankind were at first but one united
> people; then they fell at variance,
> (and resolved themselves into different
> communities which afforded them an
> opportunity to test their actions). Had not a
> decree of respite from thy Lord gone forth
> in advance, their differences would assuredly
> have borne their natural results.
> (The respite was afforded to see whether
> they could return to a united life.)

> [20] They say: "Why does not any revelation
> from his Lord come to him (announcing a doom for
> their having been at variance)?" Say to them
> (O Prophet!): "What is to befall is known only to
> God. So, wait ye! I shall also wait
> with those who wait (to see what will befall)."

SECTION 3: VERSES 21-30

As long as there is some support from some quarters man never likes to think of any divine assistance, but once every

tether forsakes him, his instinct wakes up and he tries to fill the spiritual vacuum of his personality by imploring divine help. We come across plenty of such incidents in our lifetime. In verse 22 the Qur'ān refers to an oft-quoted illustration (*vide* verse 15 of the chapter, 'The Spider', verse 32 of the chapter, 'Luqmān') of persons in distress during tempests on the high seas. No better similitude can be had of a person in despair and despondency, with no helper around and death hovering over his head. But what happens to the inmates of these ships, when they are out of danger, after the inscrutable aid of God? Once rescued, they fall back to their life of indulgence, unmindful of the hour of crisis.

It is to be noted that the aim of the Qur'ān is to develop in man a state of God-consciousness whether in joy or sorrow.

> [21] Even when We show them
> Our Mercy after they had suffered adversity,
> they create devices to thwart the path
> of mercy. Say to them: "God is swifter to
> thwart their devices. Verily, Our messengers
> (the angels) take note of what you devise."

> [22] He it is Who enableth you to travel
> by land and sea. Whenever ye go on board
> the ships—and they sail on with a
> favouring breeze,—those on board rejoice
> (saying: "What a beautiful breeze!").
> But should a tempestuous gale overtake the
> ships and the waves sweep over them from every
> side, and those on board think they are
> encompassed therewith (and none to help
> them), they call at such a moment on God in
> singleness of faith saying: "Shouldst thou
> rescue us from this, we will assuredly be grateful."

The word *baghi* encompasses all kinds of excesses committed, but when it is 'excesses on earth,' as in verse 23,

it refers to all those committed for riches and power in this world. The prime motive behind all these excesses by the rich power-mongers is to win glory in one's lifetime. Verse 24 takes this thirst for glory, a fading glory, a little further to the silence of the grave. This verse aptly compares this worldly pomp and power to the crop that adorns the fields like raiment. The crop which feeds mankind may fail with the onset of a natural calamity, similarly glories may turn into shadows. It is indeed a tragedy that man in his pride should give up the path of truth and indulge in excesses for the transient joys of life.

Belief in God is always compared to light and joy, and disbelief to darkness and gloom. Says the Qur'ān:

> "Those who believe (in Him) He bringeth them out of darkness into light." (Q. 2: 257).
>
> "On that Day shall the faces (of the believers) look joyously fresh," (Q. 75: 22).
>
> "While the faces (of the unbelievers) will look gloomy." (Q. 75: 24).
>
> "On the Day the countenances of some shall be downcast, strained and weary as they enter the burning fire." (Q. 88: 2-4).
>
> "On the Day (of Resurrection), the faces of some shall turn bright and of some shall turn black." (Q. 3: 106)

[23] But when God rescueth them
they (forgetting all their professions to God)
soon commit excesses on the earth unjustly!
O ye men! Your excesses will verily go
against yourself. They will simply
give you the enjoyment of the life present.
But mark! You will have to return
to Us. Then We will let you realise
what you have done.

[24] Verily, the life of the present resembles that water which We sent down from the heavens, whereby groweth what is food for men and cattle. As a result the earth puts on her gay raiment and is decked out, so much so that they who dwell on it fancy that what is put forth is theirs. Suddenly at such a time, Our Will manifests itself either by day or by night with the result that We render the crop into mere stubble as if no growth of crop had stood there till yesterday. Thus We make clear Our ways to those who are inclined to understand (things in their right perspective).

[25] And God beckoneth man to the abode of peace, and He directeth whom He willeth to the straight path.

In verses 26 and 27 attention is drawn to a natural phenomena. Prosperity and success will always bring joy and happiness, while failure brings disappointment and weariness. Similarly in the Hereafter the faces of the believers would be lit up with joy, while those of the unbelievers would be covered as if with the darkness of the night.

[26] His way is to afford goodness, and even an increase of it, to those who do good! Never shall their faces be covered with shame or disgrace. It is people such as these who shall be the inmates of the Garden; therein will they dwell.

[27] As for those who have wrought evil, their recompense shall be evil of like nature. There shall be no one to protect them from God (from the operation of this law of life). Shame shall cover their faces, as if deep darkness of night has draped their

countenance. It is people such as these who
shall be the inmates of Fire; therein will they dwell.

Reference is made to those who were set up as peers to God and to their worshippers in verse 28. In the Hereafter the peers would be averse to be drawn up in the same row with their worshippers, and would express their ignorance about the existence of any votary. They would contend that the devotees did not worship their peers, but in fact adored their own fancies in the devotion. Here one can recall the reply of Jesus to God, in the presence of his worshippers. Jesus would declare: "I said nothing to them except what Thou didst bid me say: 'Serve God, my Lord, and your Lord.'" (Q. 5: 117) Also refer to note at the end of this chapter.

[28] The day that We will gather them
together, We will say to those who had set up
peers for Us: "You and all those whom
you have set up as peers for Us, remain where
you are." Then will We cause them to separate
themselves, one from the other; when those
whom they have set up as peers with God
will say (to those who had thus set them up):
"It was not us that you worshipped."

[29] "God is a sufficient witness between
us and you; in fact we were unaware of
the worship you offered to us."

[30] Then everyone will realise what
everyone had done before;
and they shall all be brought back
to their God, their Protector and
all the images of fancy which they
had raised up for themselves
shall disappear from their view.

SECTION 4: VERSES 31–40

In verse 31 attention is drawn to the Order of Providence as an argument for Divine Unity. These arguments occur in pages 39–44 of Vol. 1.

Refer to note at the end of this chapter for explanation of the verses 35 and 36.

For commentary on verses 31, 39 and 41 the note at the end of this chapter may be perused.

[31] Ask them (O Prophet!): "Who nourisheth you out of the bounties of the heavens and the earth, who hath power over your hearing and seeing, and who bringeth forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living and who regulates the affairs (of existence)?" They will promptly answer: "God." Then say (to them): "If so, will you not (after rejection of truth) be mindful of Him?"

[32] "This God then is your true Lord," and then say: "Whether is it not clinging to error, denying the truth after knowing that it is truth? How then are ye so perverted?"

[33] Thus hath the word of thy Lord been justified that the unruly lot will not believe in God.

[34] Ask them (O Prophet!): "Is there anyone among those whom you set up as peers for God, who can create a being and then repeat it. Say: "It is God Who can create a being and then recreate it. Why then have you turned away (from Him)?"

[35] Ask them. "Is there anyone
among those, whom you have
set up as peers for God, who can show
the path of truth?" Say: "God alone can show
the path of truth. Is He then Who
guideth unto the truth the more worthy
to be followed, or one who
cannot find guidance for himself unless he
himself is guided? What then hath
befallen you, that you decide
things in this manner?"

[36] And most of them follow mere fancies:
but surely fancy cannot avail against truth.
God verily knoweth what all they do.

Verse 37 refers to the unique place the Qur'ān occupies as a message and guidance for mankind. Firstly, this sort of book is beyond human conception, secondly it confirms all the former scriptures, and it is far comprehensive in exposition and far deeper in import. Refer also to Vol. I, pages 31–32.

[37] Moreover the Qur'ānic content is
not such as could be conceived except by God.
It not only confirmeth what was revealed
before it, but offers from the Lord
of all the domains of existence, an apt elucidation
of what the scriptures contained,
wherein there is nothing to doubt.

[38] Do they say that he (the Prophet)
hath fashioned it himself? Say to them:
"(If you do think so), then bring forth
even a *sūra* like it and call on whom you
may beside God, to endorse
the truth of your claim"

[39] But the fact is that they have charged
with falsehood, what they cannot

comprehend and even before knowing what
it looks forward as yet to happen.
Even in like manner had they, who had
gone before, brought charge of imposture
(against the Prophets of their time).
Mark, what the end was of those
who had been so unjust!

[40] And (O Prophet!), some among
them (your people) may come forward
to believe in it (the Qur'ān) and some will not.
But your Lord knoweth full well
who among them are unjust.

SECTION 5: VERSES 41-53

In verse 42 and the next we have a description of a deteriorating society that refuses to appreciate and understand the message of truth, and such illustrations are not rare in the Qur'ān. It is a society steeped in ignorance, prejudices and a blind adherence to the traditions of their forefathers. Verse 44 points out that this decline had set in, not because God had forcibly brought the society to this miserable state, but because this was to be the natural culmination due to its irrational approach in life. Let it be remembered that God does not, in the least, wrong anyone, but it is man's own motives and deeds that make him blind and deaf to the call of truth.

[41] And if they charge thee with imposture
then say to them: "I am responsible
for what I do. So no responsibility will
lie on you for what I do, and none
on me for what ye do. (Everyone will
earn according to his deeds, and
let us wait for His Judgement).

[42] "(O Prophet!) There are some who
seem to lend a ready ear to thee: (and
thou mayst therefore be inclined to think

> that having listened to thee, they
> will accept the truth). But canst thou cause
> the deaf to hearken to thee, when
> they do not care to understand what thou
> mayst say to them?
>
> [43] Some of them also there are who seem
> to look up to thee (for guidance).
> Then how canst thou show the way to the
> blind who cannot see it?
>
> [44] Verily, God never wrongeth men in
> aught (by making them blind
> to truth). It is they who wrong themselves (by
> neglecting to utilise aright the
> talents with which they are gifted and
> declining to acknowledge what is right).

Verse 45 describes the realisation on the Day-after of man's short life interval enjoyed in this world, between a long span of life before and a longer one to follow. It is like waking up from a dream. This subject is referred to, in verse 12 of 'Al-Mu'minūn.' verse 20 of 'Al-Rūm,' verse 42 of 'Al-Aḥqaf' and the last verses of 'Al-Nāzi'āt.' Verse 52 of 'Al-Rūm' states that men of faith and understanding would not be subjected like others to this acute realisation of the worldly life.

> [45] On the Day when He will gather them
> together, it will seem to them that
> they had tarried (in this world) but for an
> hour of the day, just to recognise
> each other. They were at a great loss
> who had refused to believe that they would
> meet with God, and had thus not
> guided themselves aright.

Verse 46 prophesies the triumph of the Prophet's mission both in this world and the Hereafter. The polytheists should

understand that this achievement is the responsibility of God, and that it does not depend on the life of a single person either at present or in future, and that full realisation of this success would dawn in the Hereafter.

Verse 47 refers to the Ways of Allah in dealing with those nations to whom His messengers were sent with His revelations, and how the people tried to suppress the message, and how God 'judged them with justice' and 'with truth.' Refer to Vol.I, pages 68–70 for details.

[46] (O Prophet!) Whether We let thee live
to see some of the things of which We
had forewarned them (the unbelievers of Arabia)
to come to pass, or whether
We let thee complete thy course
of life before this, it is certain they shall
all have to return to Us, then will God testify to
what they had done

[47] And every people have had
their Apostle (born among them
and delivering the message of truth)
and when their Apostle came to them, the
issue between them was rightly decided
and they were not wronged.

[48] And yet they say (to the Prophet):
"If you speak the truth, tell us when will
that, with which you warn us (the result
of rejecting what you say), come to pass?"

[49] (O Prophet!) Say to them:
"(It is not in my power to say
when this will come to pass). I have no
power even over my own weal or woe.
Only that happens what God wills!
Every people have a term set for them.
When their term has to expire, they

shall retard it nor advance it a
moment thereafter."

Verse 50 is a wish of the polytheists expressed to the Prophet for instantaneous punishment, but God has set a time limit. For details, refer to Vol. 1, pages 68–70.

Verse 53 records the doubts of those who vouched the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Prophet, but they felt uneasy at the proclamation of his message which went against the tenets of their ancestors. They enquired whether what he said was going to pass. The Prophet, in reply, questioned them as to what made them doubt his integrity, and asserted that God was his witness to every word that he uttered.

[50] (O Prophet!) Ask them to consider
what after all can they do when the
chastisement of God overtakes
them suddenly by night or by day? What
is there about it that these wicked people
should be so anxious to see it hasten on?

[51] (Tell them): "Will you then believe
in it only when it falleth on you?
(But at that hour it will avail not to
believe in it. At that hour it will
be said to you): "Yes, you will now believe it!
You indeed were those who
had challenged its speedy coming."

[52] Then shall it be said to the wicked:
"Taste ye an abiding chastisement! What
other return do ye expect to have
except what ye have worked for?"

[53] They desire thee to inform them whether
this will truly come to pass? Say: "Yes,
by my Lord, it will and you will not escape it."

SECTION 6: VERSES 54–60

In verse 57 are given the following four attributes of the Qur'ān:

(i) It is an admonition with arguments that appeals to the intellect and the spirit, and leads a person towards truth and happiness, and forbids one from committing evil. The word *maw'iza* means a rational method of admonition.

(ii) It is a healing for the ailments of heart. Individuals or a group of persons that follow its instructions would cleanse themselves from all ills. Here the word *ṣadr* or heart stands for all the physical and intellectual attainments of a human being.

(iii) It is a guidance for all those who believe in its message.

(iv) It is a mercy for all the believers: and it saves the world from every sort of prejudice, dissension, hatred and would make this world an abode of love and peace.

This is not a mere self-praise, but an argument and a fact. If a doctor claims himself to be an expert, and if every patient that enters his hospital comes out completely cured, he needs no letters of recommendation. Among the ignorant and aggressive polytheists of Mecca in a process of metamorphosis a group of men like Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Abūdhar, etc., turn a new leaf in their lifetime under the spell of the Qur'ān. What better testimony is needed about the abiding qualities of this glorious book?

[54] And if everyone who had sinned
(should know in advance what
dire punishment awaiteth him), he
would assuredly offer as ransom all that there
is in the earth, should it happen
to be in his possession ; and such people
(remembering their insolence and rejection)

will readily proclaim their repentance
when they behold this punishment
staring in the face. And they shall be
meted out a just judgement and
they shall not be wronged.

[55] Remember, all that is in heavens
and the earth is God's (and there is
none who shares in the least His
Power). Remember also that the promise
of God always holds good (and is inviolable),
yet most of these people know it not.

[56] He it is Who giveth life and He it
is Who dealeth death, and He it is
to Whom finally all shall return.

[57] O men! Now hath an admonition
come to you from your Lord,
and a healing for the ailments of your
hearts, and guidance and mercy to those
who pay heed (to the admonition).

[58] (O Prophet!) Say to them: "This
(kindly treatment is meted out
to you) through the Grace of God and
His Mercy, and over this let them rejoice;
and this (kindly treatment) should
be more precious to you than all
the wealth that you may have amassed."

In verse 59 we have a reference to the superstitious beliefs of the Arab polytheists in regard to vegetable and animal foodstuffs, and their habit of declaring any food unlawful for consumption. This topic is also discussed in verses 138 to 150 of 'The Cattle.' Here it is declared that:

(i) The Qur'ān makes lawful every article of food except those that have been forbidden by divine decree as unclean and injurious.

(ii) Only God is authorised to forbid any article for consumption, and this power is not left to the whims of human conjecture.

(iii) Whenever mention is made of the habit of the polytheists' foisting of lies on God, this charge of blasphemy includes the whims of the polytheists to name things lawful and unlawful.

(iv) The bases of human beliefs and actions should be founded on knowledge and science, and not on human caprice and superstition.

In the pre-Qur'ānic period of barbarity and ignorance, nations and groups were bound by superstition in regard to animal and vegetable food. The Qur'ānic revelations redeemed man from such enslavement, and it also deals a blow to that pattern of asceticism and religiosity where too many restrictions are laid down on food habits.

[59] Say to them: "What think ye of
what ye have done? Of what God hath
afforded to you for sustenance, you have
(out of superstition and conjecture)
wilfully declared for yourselves, some of it as
lawful and some of it as unlawful!"
Say to them: "Hath God permitted you
(to make this distinction)
or do you foist an untruth on God?"

[60] What is the view that these people,
who have foisted on God an untruth,
take of the Resurrection? (Do they think
that this iniquity of theirs will
go unnoticed?) Truly, God is full of
bounty to man. (Pity it is that instead of
making a free use of what is good
to him, he is wrangling over what is lawful

and what is unlawful). But most
of them give not thanks for
what they have been given

SECTION 7: VERSES 61-70

While using the word *kitāb* in verse 61 the Qur'ān reveals a feature of its style, which signifies that a sort of permanence is attached to that action or thing. This is used in verse 183 of the chapter, 'The Cow,' while prescribing fasting in the month of Ramaḍān, in verse 36 of 'The Repentance' to show the fixture of twelve months in the scheme of a year, and in verse 4 of 'Al-Ḥajj' while describing the divine decree of consigning the friends of Satan to eternal fire.

Thus this word is used whenever a universal law governing either the creation of the earth or the heavens comes into force. This verse also confirms that nothing whether big or small is beyond His Control. Explanation of such verses is beyond human power and understanding as this also refers to the Domain of the Unseen.

It is also worthy of note that from ancient times royal *firmāns* or proclamations were preserved in writing and then put into safe custody and sometimes exhibited abroad. It connotes that the scribed matter could not suffer the slightest alteration. This was the conception of the Arabs also and the Qur'ān seems to endorse this view.

The explanation for verse 62 may be seen in the note at the end of this chapter.

[61] There is no work in which thou art
engaged (O Prophet!) or any verse that
thou reciteth out of the Qur'ān, and
(ye men!) there is nothing that you do,
over which We do not keep Our watch.
And remember, nothing, not even an atom,
either in the earth or in the heavens,

escapeth the notice of thy Lord, and
there is nothing greater
or smaller than even an atom which is not noted
in the perspicacious knowledge of God.

[62] Behold the friends of God!
On them shall come no fear
nor shall they grieve.

[63] These are they who have believed
in God and are mindful of Him—and
(have consequently abstained from everything evil).

[64] To them tidings come
(from their God) of a happy life both in
this world and in the next. The Word of God
is never revoked. This in itself
is a great felicity.

The Qur'ān first enunciates facts, then gives arguments and finally delivers the message. This can be seen in verses 65-68.

In verse 69 we have a lesson: a person who foists lies would never prosper.

[65] And (O Prophet!) do not let the
babblings (of thy enemies) grieve thee.
(They cannot have any power
over you) for, power belongs only to God.
(He exalteth whom He pleaseth
and whom He wilt He doth abase)
He indeed hears (what they say) and
knows (what they aim to do).

[66] Remember! Whatever is in the
heavens or in the earth is subject to the control
of God. What is it that those who set
up peers for God really follow?
Nothing but their own fancy: and they
are a people who indulge in conceits.

[67] He it is Who hath ordained for you the night wherein to rest and the day to move about in light. Verily, in this (scheme of God, the Provider) are signs for those who hearken.

[68] They say that God has taken to Himself a son. No, by His glory! He is the Self-Sufficient; whatever is in earth is His. Have you any warranty (from God) to make such a statement? Do you attribute to God what ye know not?

[69] Say (O Prophet to them!): Verily, they who coin lies against God shall not fare well.

[70] They may enjoy what there is in the world; then to Us they shall have to return; then will We make them taste Our chastisement against God, for having blasphemed.

SECTION 8: VERSES 71-82

From verse 71 onward the Prophet was asked to relate the story of Noah as a precedent. Noah had declared that in opposing him, his people should not leave any stone unturned against him. If he was truthful their attempts would be vain, and so did it happen.

The convictions of the bearers of the message of Allāh are surely of a very high order, so they do not seek any recompense from anybody, except from God. When they asked their own unbelieving people to fight against them tooth and nail, the messengers of God were certain that they would triumph and the forces opposing them would fail and vanish.

Similar were the opposing forces in various countries, where the messengers of Allāh invited their people to accept the divine message. From verse 75, the mission of Moses is related in detail, for his name was not unfamiliar to the contemporary Arabs. The following aspects are highlighted here:

(i) One who invents a lie against Allāh cannot prosper.

(ii) The same would be the fate of those who contend against the Prophets.

(iii) Guidance cannot be forced on an unwilling person, and he would never accept the divine message even in spite of numerous signs from God. This holds good even to this day.

In verse 77 Moses defended himself when he was charged with sorcery and he asserted that a divine sign was not such a cheap show as magic which could not succeed against divine miracles.

In verse 86 occurs the word *al-ḥaq* which stands for steadfastness, and anything that is decisive and eternal: and its negative is *bāṭil*. The Qur'ān always calls truth as *ḥaq* and untruth as *bāṭil*; and suggests that truth only could prevail and untruth would come to nought. In verse 8 of 'The Spoils of War' also we find this word used thus: "That He might prove that truth always prevails and falsehood comes to nought, however much the evil-minded may dislike it." Vol. I, pages 66-68 may be referred for further details.

[71] And (O Prophet!) relate to
them the story of Noah. When
he said to his people: "If, O my people, my
dwelling with you and my
admonishing you, in the light of
divine injunctions, prove in any manner
unpleasant to you, then I can
only fall back upon my God. You may go on
designing against me in co-operation
with your partners (false deities)
and do not let your designs betray any defect.
Then take some definite decision
against me and delay not
in carrying it out (and see the result).

[72] "If you, however, (do not listen and turn your backs on me, (then you alone will have to suffer). For my part (whatever I do, I do for your sake) I ask no reward from you. My reward is with God alone. I am commanded by Him to be of those who sincerely submit to His Command."

[73] But they still treated him as a liar. Therefore, We rescued him and those who were with him in the ark, and caused them to succeed in authority over those, who had charged Our signs with falsehood and whom We had drowned. See then what the end was of those who had been warned (of the consequences of evil living).

[74] Then, after him We raised Apostles among the people (of Noah) and they appeared before them with valid credentials; but (even before looking into their credentials) they would not believe in what the Apostles had (because they had) already looked upon (the credentials) as false. Thus do We seal up the hearts of those who persist in error.

[75] Then sent We after them Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his nobles with signs from Us, but they behaved arrogantly with them since they were of wicked people.

[76] But when the truth from Us was manifested before them, they said, "Verily, this definitely is sorcery."

[77] Moses said: "Is this what you think of the truth; is it sorcery, although (as you should know) sorcerers do not prosper?"

[78] They said: "Have you come to us to turn us away from the way of life which our forebears had followed. so that you two may rule in the land? (Take it from us that) we will not believe in you."

[79] And Pharaoh said: "Fetch me all the skilled sorcerers (that there are in my dominions)."

[80] And when the sorcerers arrived, (and the stage prepared for the trial of power), Moses said to them: "Cast down (on the stage) whatever you have to cast."

[81] And when they did cast whatever they had (their staffs and ropes), Moses said: "What you have brought is mere sorcery and God will set it nought. (Remember) God will not let the work of evil-doers prosper.

[82] "And God will prove truth to be indeed truth by His behests, even though the wicked may not like it."

SECTION 9: VERSES 83–92

In verse 83 we have the word *dhurriyya* which refers to those who believed in the message of Moses. Literally the word means, youngsters, children, and generation. As a new nation under a Prophet with his latest message needs new blood to face impending trials and tribulations, a young group of men with fresh minds and strong bodies is preferred to an older generation of followers. The powerful and cruel Pharaoh had kept the older men under his thumb but it was difficult to

hold in check a new generation of fearless young men. Having openly refuted his authority they devoutly followed Moses in obedience to the call of truth.

[83] And none believed in Moses
except the youth from among his own people,
for fear of Pharaoh and his nobles
persecuting them. For, of a truth, Pharaoh
was indeed an all-powerful king in the
land and given to excesses.

[84] And Moses said: "O my people!
If you truly believe in God and care to
be of those who obey Him in every
respect, place then all your trust in Him
(and fear not the might of Pharaoh)."

[85] And they said: "In God do we place
our trust. O, our Lord, do not try us
by handing us over to these tyrants.

[86] "And by Thy mercy, deliver us
from the yoke of a people who
do not believe (in Thee)."

[87] And We revealed to Moses and
his brother; "Appoint for your people
certain houses from those of theirs in Egypt,
marking therein the direction of Qibla,
(the side to which they should turn
for prayer), and organise regular prayer
therein, and cheer them up with
tidings of a good day to come for them,"

[88] And Moses exclaimed: "O our Lord!
Thou hast indeed given to Pharaoh and
his nobles pomp and pelf in the life of this
world. Our Lord! (is this given them that)
they slide from Thy path? Our Lord!

deprive them of their riches, and harden
their hearts that they might continue in unbelief
till they meet the dire chastisement
(that is to overtake them)."

[89] He said: "The prayer of you
both is granted: pursue, therefore, undeterred
by anything the straight path, and be not
drawn to the path of those who have
no knowledge (of what is right)."

[90] And then We led the Children of
Israel through the sea, and Pharaoh and his
hosts pursued them in a hostile sort to
harass them, until Pharaoh, on the
point of drowning, cried out,
"I believe that there is no God but He,
the God in Whom the Children of Israel
believe, and I declare myself to be one of those,
who yield to God (in utmost sincerity)."

[91] (He said), "Yes, that is so now,
although in the past thou wert rebellious
and wast one of the most wicked ones."

The contents of verse 92 look paradoxical. Pharaoh and his army found a watery grave but God willed the preservation of his body, as a lesson and a sign of a tyrant, who was unmindful of God. It was a practice in Egypt to embalm the bodies of great personages like the kings, ministers, etc., and such a body is called a mummy, a Greek word probably of Egyptian origin. Many such mummies have been discovered since the early eighteenth century and they adorn the famous museums of the world. The meaning of the verse is: "You cannot be saved from death Pharaoh, but your body would be preserved so that the coming generations may get a lesson." If the Egyptologists are correct, the Pharaoh was Rameses II, and his mummy can be seen in the Cairo museum. For a detailed discussion of various aspects await for my 'Al-Bayān.'

[92] "But this day will We however rescue
thee, in thy body, that thou mayst serve
as a warning to those who come
after thee. For, verily, a great many
men are, of truth, unheedful of Our warnings."

Whenever the Quran wishes to address itself to the believers, it does so through the Prophet, for example, the opening verse of 'The Divorce' reads: "O Prophet! When you have to divorce women..." Here in verse 94 there is direct reference through the Prophet to that group of pioneers, who embraced Islam and suffered miserably in consequence.

In verse 98 is a reference to the episode of the Prophet Yūnus of the Israelites. The Hebraic name is Yūnāh, and the Arabic is Yūnus. In the Old Testament, there is the Book of Jonah, wherein he warned the people of Niniveh (near Mosul, Iraq) that their city would be doomed after forty days, for they were a people given to excess. Upon hearing this prophesy everyone, from the king to an ordinary pauper, repented for his actions, and God, out of mercy, averted the chastisement, and allowed them a respite. After Jonah, the nation reverted to its life of past excesses and about 690 B.C., Prophet Nahoam warned them about the impending doom. Some seventy years later the Babylonians invaded Niniveh, while the impregnable walls of the city succumbed to the fury of the flooded Tigris. The city fell and as a Greek historian recorded, it was destroyed beyond recognition.

Here the people of Mecca are made to understand that rejection and intransigence of truth are not new to that part of the Arab world, and that no nation, however great, ever accepted the truth from any messenger of God. The only exception we have is in the case of Jonah and the people of Niniveh.

[93] Indeed, the Children of Israel
We let, settle down in a congenial place

(as promised in Palestine), and
provided them with wholesome provision for
their sustenance. But whenever they
(in their new settlement) differed among
themselves on anything, the light of
revelation came to them (through Prophets)
for their guidance. Nevertheless,
they continued to fall into variance.
Thy Lord will surely decide between them on
the Day of requital in respect of
what they differed in.

[94] And (O Prophet!) if what is
revealed to thee here is doubted,
then let a reference be made to those
who have read the scriptures delivered before
thee. Verily, it is truth that hath come to thee
from thy Lord. Do not therefore heed
what is said by those who doubt this truth.

[95] Nor do ye listen to those
who charge the revelations of God with
falsehood, lest thou be counted as one of them
by those who will suffer loss.

[86] Verily, they against whom the
decree of God has already gone forth,
will not believe in the truth.

[97] Even though every sign comes to them
from God, they will not believe till they see
a heavy chastisement overtakes them.

[98] Were there any people of any city,
who returned to the state of belief
(in God) and enjoyed the resultant benefits
(before any doom overtook them for their
previous state of unbelief) except
the people of Jonah? When they

(the people of Jonah) returned to belief,
We delivered them from the chastisement
which they would have received in
this world, and provided them with the
means of comfortable living for a time.

Verses 99 and 100 throw light on human nature and understanding, and this subject is often repeated in the Qur'ān. It is in the very nature of a human being to differ from others, and his likes and dislikes are in proportion to his talents. The reaction for every event is not the same in every person: each has his own view, and man's reaction and choice lead him either to the highest pinnacle of glory or bring about a total downfall. In other words man's talents come into play with each action. God Himself has created this variety in mankind, so that "He might test you to find which of you is truly righteous." (Q. 67 : 2). So, it is stressed here, that if a person is unwilling to accept the message of God, he should not be forced to do so. Verse 256 of 'The Cow' reads that: "There shall be no compulsion in religion," and this lays down the guide-line for good.

[99] But (O Prophet!) if thy Lord
had pleased, surely all those who dwell
on the earth would have believed together,
(but that is not the way of God.
He lets every one to think out things
for himself and bear the responsibility for
his action. So, if there be any
who do not follow thy advice), will
thou then bring pressure to bear on them
till they believe in what thou sayest?

[100] And (remember) no one can believe
in God except by the process fixed for it
by God. (The law of life laid by God
is that having instilled into the nature
of man the talent to distinguish between

right and wrong, He lets the individual to exercise
his mind between the two and meet
the result thereof). It is why He lets those
who do not follow reason to sink
in their own dirt.

[101] (O Prophet!) say to them: "Ponder
ye on all that there is in the heavens
(above) and on the earth (around) and
see (what they portend for you)! But for those
who disdain to understand the meaning
of things, neither the signs of God (in the
heavens and the earth), nor the admonitions
(of Warners and Prophets) will avail.

[102] Why do they put off (accepting the
right way)? Do they desire to see
the days (of doom) to befall
them even as had befallen those before them
(ere they could believe in the right way?).
Tell them: "If so, wait (for the
inevitable). I too will wait with you."

[103] (When such a day of doom arrives),
will We deliver from it Our Apostles
and all those who believe in Us, and (this
We do because) it is binding on Us
to save those who are faithful to Us.

SECTION 11: VERSES 104–109

In verse 104 the Prophet is asked to speak to the unbelievers of Mecca in very clear terms, so that they may dispel any doubt they have, that the Prophet might incorporate some tenets of their belief in Islam. The Prophet proclaims that he would never worship the pagan gods, for, he has been commanded to worship Him, the One, alone and spread His message. Now it is left to them to make the choice, whether to accept or reject the truth, and God could judge between them.

[104] Say to them (O Prophet!):
"O ye men! If ye are in doubt as to what faith
I profess, then, (be it known to you) that
I serve not those whom you serve beside God;
instead, I serve God alone Who (controls
your life and) will cause you to die,
and I am commanded by Him
to be of those who believe in Him."

[105] And (I have been asked to)
turn steadfastly towards the faith which is
thoroughly straightforward, and never keep
company with those who set up peers for God.

[106] Never invoke anyone beside God,
who can neither help thee nor hurt thee;
if thou do thus, thou wilt be counted
among those who act unjustly.

[107] Should God let any harm come
to thee, mark it, that none can deliver thee
from it except He. (And in like manner)
should He bring thee any good,
none there is who can cross His will.
He confers His gifts on whomsoever He
pleaseth from among His servants,
for, He is Gracious, Merciful.

A call as we have here in verse 108, has been made by many other Prophets in the past. Acceptance of belief in God is a voluntary act based on man's own independent evaluation of the truthfulness of the message. In this everyone is responsible for his own choice. There is neither coercion nor quarrel, for it touches one's own well-being in this world and the Hereafter, and acceptance would undoubtedly bring benefits and rejection leads to one's own loss.

[108] Say to them (O Prophet!): "O ye
men, the truth from your Lord hath now

definitely come to you. He who
cares to be guided by it, will be guided to
his own advantage; but he who chooseth to err,
will only err to his own disadvantage;
and I am in no way responsible to protect
you (as a *wakīl* under my control
from the consequence of your doings)."

[109] (So far as thou art concerned,
O Prophet!) thou hadst better follow
what is revealed to thee and pursue thy path
steadfastly till the issue (between
thee and thy detractors) is settled by
God, Who is the best of Judges.

Prophets as Warners

When we read verse 108, the question props up as to what is the place of a messenger of truth if he is "not in any way a *wakīl*, a protector." The Prophet claims his place as a messenger from God, and warner, *nadhīr*, whose duty is to guide the people, show them the path of righteous living and give them glad tidings of the consequent doom of a wicked life, that follows the rejection of truth. Here then ends his responsibility. The Qur'ān refers to him at other places also in the manner stated above, but declares in clear terms that he is not a protector, nor an advocate, nor one who has the monopoly of forcing men to follow his message. It is said:

"Thy function is not to compel them
(to embrace the faith). (Q. 50 : 35).

"Thou indeed art not responsible
for what they do." (Q. 88 : 22).

Mark, whether there is any other clear road to happiness other than truth. If this simple truth had been understood, the world might have been saved from many schisms and conflicts of beliefs. The pity is man had never confessed his

excesses and wrongs; and failure to recognise this weakness had led to irreparable suffering.

The Qur'ān relates many instances of the call of truth: and in every instance the messengers declared their mission and adhered to their own way of life, while guiding their people. It is then for the people to accept or reject their call, for no compulsion was exercised to mend their beliefs and actions by the messengers. On the other hand, the unbelievers felt hurt and took this message as an insult to their ancestral beliefs, and adopted an insolent and aggressive tone as we find in the following verse 88 of 'The Heights

> "Said the leaders...........puffed with pride: 'O, Shu'aib: We shall expel thee and those who have believed with thee from the city, or ye all had better return to our faith.' Replied he: 'Shall we return to your faith when we abhor it?'"

Similarly was the case of contention between the believers and the unbelievers of Islam. The Qur'ān always showed the path of truth and warned them of the consequences of their rejection, and it was open for them either to accept after understanding it, or allow other believers to follow the message. The adamant unbelievers insisted that they and all others would be made to believe in their ancestral way of life under force.

Here and at many other places the Qur'ān repeats the same declaration. The world would have been saved from many catastrophies by adopting this ideology of *tandhīr* and *tawkīl.* The former gives a warning, but acceptance lies with the listeners, not with the warner. *Tawkīl* is to force your ideas on others as if the speaker only has all the rights of goodness and the rest are wicked. When the Qur'ān itself allows the Prophets a status of warners only, how can anybody take up the role of an aggressive advocate in the name of truth?

In fact, it is a matter of one's rights and limitations in human code of conduct. It is often noticed that no one likes to be within his limits, and this is the greatest cause for human blunders and the resultant degradation. Undoubtedly a person has a right to propagate his ideas, but he should not deny the right of the other either to accept or reject this message. This right is *ḥaq*, but the Qur'ān terms this right as *farḍ* or duty. Thus the Qu'rān states if a person believes in truth, then it is his duty, *farḍ*, to transmit this message to others, and he is accountable to God, if he fails in this duty, but he need not use coercive measures. The following verse 164 of 'The Heights' beautifully illustrates this point.

> "A group of inhabitants had asked those (who were engaged in admonishing the people that did not observe the Sabbath), why they exerted themselves for those whom God would destroy by way of chastisement. They said: 'This (we do) to absolve ourselves from any charge of neglect of duty by your Lord, and also in the hope that they may haply abstain from evil.' "

Mark, how judiciously the Qur'ān has solved the problem. On the one hand, the spirit of delivering the message and admonition is kept alive, and on the other, care is taken not to override the individual freedom of either acceptance or rejection of the call. If hands are laid on individual liberty, it will become a question of law and order.

As in the case of many other matters, the world took more than twelve centuries to comprehend this simple difference between admonition and coercion, and that human blood should not be spilled for difference in beliefs. For the past one and a half century it is one of the freedoms that a citizen has come to enjoy; but the world is ignorant that this freedom existed for twelve centuries before the declaration of Human Rights in France and the United States of America.

It is a pity that Muslims have themselves forgotten these Qur'ānic teachings, hence so many beliefs, so many parties and so many conflicts.

Creation of Universe in Six Days

In verse 3 it is stated that He is the Lord, Who had created the universe in six days. In verse 54 of 'Al-A'rāf' also there is a similar reference, and now it is worthwhile to collect all these verses that suggest this creation.

(i) The heavens and the earth were created out of matter which the Qur'ān calls as *dukhān* which means smoke or vapour. Verse 11 of chapter 41, 'Bowing Down' reads thus: "Then he turned to the sky which was a *dukhān*."

(ii) This material was a confused mass in the beginning, and its components were separated and from this, the heavenly bodies came into being. Verse 30 of chapter 21, 'The Prophets', says: "That the heavens and the earth were (in the beginning) of a piece together and that We separated them."

(iii) The whole universe was not created at once, but on the other hand it was all done by stages.

(iv) The seven zones of heaven were completed within two days, as we have in verse 12 of 'Bowing Down': "And We designed and created seven zones of heaven in two days."

(v) Verse 9 of the same chapter, describes the creation of earth in two days thus: "Ask the unbelievers (O Prophet), "Do you really disbelieve in Him, Who created the earth in but two days, and (it being so) can ye set up peers to Him? So (exalted) is He, the Lord of all domains of existence."

(vi) The levelling and the beautification of the earth and the raising of the mountains were undertaken in two stages, thus completing four days, as we have in verse 10 of the same chapter: "And in four days did He make therein firm

mountains rise high above it, and He blessed it and measured out means of subsistence to everything as (the nature of) each demanded."

(vii) All the living bodies (viz., the animal and vegetable kingdoms) were created from water. Verse 30 of 'The Prophets' says: "And through water did We give life to everything."

(viii) The creation of man underwent a number of stages: "And He has created ye by stages." (Q. 71:14)

In short, in the beginning there was a vaporous matter, which was divided into varieties, and from each variety was created a domain of existence; and from the same such matter the earth, the mountains, the rain and water, the vegetable and animal kingdoms, and finally life in all its glory took shape.

Modern scientific theories about the creation of the universe, and the evolution of life on this planet do seem to agree to this Qur'ānic view but these are after all man-made, and they are liable to change, therefore, interpretation and entire dependence on these current theories should be avoided. In the past, exegists had fallen into this trap by too much reliance on the Israelite traditions, and Ḥāfiz Ibn Kathir collected all the material of this type. The aim of the Qur'ān is to invite the attention of man to His Power and Wisdom, and not to make an exposition of the creation of this universe.

Stations of the Moon

Reference is made in verse 5 to the stations marked for the moon. In chapter 36 'Yāsīn' verse 39 reads: "And as for the moon, We have assigned stages for it, till it assumes the form of a dried up palm branch." The moon takes twenty seven days, seven hours and forty two minutes to complete one revolution round the earth, and then she disappears near the same star from where she started her journey. Every night the moon is observed near some star or some constellation of stars, which is reckoned as her station, and from here she starts her

journey of twenty seven days and seven hours in twenty eight stages, at an approximate distance of 13° per day. This is an eternal feature and all these stars bear names also.

Nothing is more attractive in the sky for a person than the beautiful rising and setting of the sun and the moon. The sun rises and sets at appropriate times and man considers it the day, and solar months and years are calculated accordingly. The moon rises and sets at her own time, and appears and disappears during certain nights in a regular order, and the period between two new moons is reckoned as a lunar month. This is the result of observation and study by different nations that inhabit this globe. In India these stations are known as *nukshatras* beginning with Ashvini and ending with Revati. The Chinese count twenty eight stations and call them *suyu.* Perhaps the Babylonians and the Assyrians were the earliest to make observations in this field. There is evidence from the sacred book of the Zoroastrians, *Bon Dahesh* that the ancient Iranians were not unfamiliar to these facts.

It is not known whether the ancient Arabs learnt about these calculations through the priestly classes of other nations or by themselves. The Arabs knew about these lunar motions from time immemorial, and later on Muslim scholars compared these to the Ptolemaic calculations.* Modern European astronomers agree with these facts. The Arabic names of these stations of the moon are, al-Shartān, al-Butain, al-Thuraiya, al-Dabarān, al-Haqa', al-Dhirā', al-Nathra, al-Ţaraf, al-Jabha, al-Zabda, al-Şarfa, al-Hana', al-Awwa, al-Simāku'l A'zal, al-Ghufar, al-Zubāna, al-Iklīl, al-Qalb, al-Shaula, al-Na'ā'm, al-Balda, Sadu'dh Dhābiḥ, Sa'd Bala' Sa'du's Su'ūd, Sa'du'l Akhbia, al-Farghu'l-Awwal, al-Fargh' ath-Thānī, Batnu'l-Ḥūt. The last three are also called Fargh' al-Dalwil-Muqaddam, Fargh al-Dalwil-Mu'akhkhar and al-Rashā'.

* Abdu'r Rahmạn al-Sufi in *Suwaru'l-Kawakib* and Al-Beruni in *Asar-al-Baqiya* have made a note of it. Qazwini in *'Ajai'b-Makhluqat* also refers to this subject.

The Hereafter

One of the fundamental beliefs of the great religions of the world is that man's life does not cease to exist after death, but it continues in the light of its actions in this world. The Qur'ān expounds the belief in Allāh as one of the basic tenets, and all other laws governing the creation as subsidiary, and this differs from the common conceptions of other religions. As every material has properties of its own, and every event has results of its own, man's actions too have their own qualities with the consequent results. (Refer to Vol. I pages 154–170 for details). Those who perform good deeds would in future enjoy the eternal happiness of paradise and of the Divine Presence, while the wicked would be deprived of this felicity. The Qur'ān has described the condition of the good and the wicked in the Hereafter in detail at a number of places, as we have here in verse 4. We cannot comprehend future state of life as it is beyond human intellect. But why should one believe in it? Human instinct guides and reason strengthens us to a reality beyond the present existence. A denial of this rationale will end the very question of the present life.

Again a denial of the existence of God and the Hereafter would leave all the questions of this life and its existence remain unsolved; but once we affirm our faith in God and the Hereafter, we forsake the state of groping in disbelief and ignorance, and come to light and understanding.

When the scenes of the Hereafter are presented to us, we try to feel and understand them in the light of our present senses. The Qur'ān and the *hadith* are clear that one should not think about the gardens of the paradise and the fire of hell on the lines of the present life. In verse 17 of chapter 32 'Al-Sajda' we have: "No one can realise what joys of the eyes are reserved for (the good) as a reward of their deeds."

The Prophet said of the heaven that no one had seen, nor heard, nor can it be comprehended (*Muslim*), and the pleasures of paradise are incomparable except in name (*Ibn Kathir*). Thus

one cannot imagine in this world, the happiness of the paradise nor the pain of hell. It is then, but futile to indulge in mere fanciful thinking.

The Qur'ān has classified the revelation into two categories, one the *muḥkamāt*, the clear verses, and the other *mutashābihāt*, the figurative ones. About the latter it is said, "None knoweth the reality about them except Allah." (Q. 3: 7). Thus all matters belonging to the domain of the Unseen come under this category, and the same verse 7 of 'Āl-i 'Imrān' continues: "And those too who make a right approach to knowledge could only say: 'We believe therein: all is from our Lord. None can catch their significance except those gifted with insight.' "

Return to Our Presence

The Qur'ān compares the Hereafter as a return to the Divine Presence. We have expressions like, "Those who wish the Divine Presence," "those who denied the Divine Presence, that is, the Hereafter," "a believer is one, who desires the Divine Presence," "an unbeliever is one who is satisfied with the life of this world and he never desires the Divine Presence," and in this chapter verse 7 reads: "Verily, those who do not expect to return unto Our Presence and feel satisfied with the life of the world and are content with it, and who do not pay heed to what We have revealed."

About the believers it is often mentioned that their "faces look joyously fresh as they behold their Lord" (Q. 75: 22-23). On the other hand the unbelievers "shall be debarred from beholding the Countenance of their Lord," (Q. 83: 15). In short, the Hereafter and its gifts amount to the Divine Presence, and the chastisement is nothing but an exclusion of a person from this bliss.

Some verses speak, that out of many rewards in the Hereafter, one and the highest is *riḍwān*, the approbation of the Lord, and we have in verse 72 of the 'Al-Tawba'; "And what shall be of the highest value to them is the approbation of God that shall be vouchsafed to them."

In India transmigration of soul is the recompense for all the human deeds. The followers of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, and some of the ancient Egyptians and the Greeks believed in this cycle of births and rebirths. Recently a theosophist tries to prove in his book that the Qur'ān in its reference to the return of the soul had also contributed to this theory of transmigration. The soul, according to this author is often born and often returns to its source. Such an inference is misleading, for in the Qur'ān we have a return, but in the transmigration we have a series of such recurrences.

Guidance and Truth

"Ask them (O Prophet!): 'Is there anyone among those whom you have set up as peers for God, who can show the path of truth (*ḥaq*)?' Say: 'God alone can show the path of truth (*ḥaq*). Is He then Who guideth (*yahdī*) into the truth (*ḥaq*) the more worthy to be followed, or one who cannot find guidance for himself unless he himself is guided? What then hath befallen you, that you decide things in this manner?"

The words guidance (*hidāyat*) and truth (*ḥaq*) are used in verse 35, and the commentators in both Persian and Urdu took them as guidance of revelation and truth of religion, unmindful of the fact that the verses were addressed to the polytheists of Mecca who rejected both the revelation and the religion.

In the first part of the verse there is a question whether any of the peers could show the path of truth. In the second, it is affirmed that only God could do this. In the third part is an argument that when none could guide except God, they have to follow the guidance (of instinct and reason) from God. By truth is meant the right path or the clear way. For details refer to Vol. I, pages 145–152. In the following verses reference is made to the guidance of instinct and reason.

"Our Lord is He, Who giveth to everything a nature befitting it, and then guideth it aright." (Q. 20 : 50).

> "Who createth (everything) and giveth a form appropriate to each : and Who hath assigned talents appropriate to each and then giveth them guidance." (Q. 87 : 2-3).

Here in verse 35 it is a clear questioning of the powers of the peers set up by the polytheists. Can these peers invest the power of sight, hearing and reasoning to mankind? No. God only had this power and the polytheists never denied this fact, but their contention was that the peers were like the courtiers who enjoyed some power and could recommend the cases of the polytheists to God. Then in a straightforward manner the verse finally asks the polytheists to turn to the original source of power and guidance that is God, and not the peers who are in need of guidance.

...ension and Rejection of Truth

Verse 39 addresses itself to those who reject the divine revelation thus: "But the fact is that they have charged with falsehood what they cannot comprehend. Even in the like manner had they, who had gone before, brought charges of imposture (against the Prophets). Mark, what the end was of those...unjust."

Here the Qur'ān finds the polytheists guilty of two distinctive traits in their character, one of believing anything without knowing, the other of rejecting anything which is beyond their comprehension. In verse 36 it has been stated that the polytheists were deprived of reason and understanding, and that they depend only on their whims and fancies. What did they reject? They rejected the revelations from God, that were delivered to one among them. The Qur'ān declared that the basis of either belief or disbelief was more a human fancy. The right approach should have been to test the message with reason and understanding, but it was not so. The messenger of truth was armed with knowledge and reason, whereas the unbelievers behaved according to their whims and fancies. In verse 36 the Qur'ān

states: "But merely fancy cannot avail against truth." This has been the sad plight of every person who went astray. Reason is the touchstone that differentiates truth from ignorance and superstition; and it also liberates one from doubt and atheism.

Here it is worthwhile to note that the standards of human understanding differ from one another. Those things which are beyond some one's comprehension are very simple for some other. This dissimilarity exists in different societies and at different periods, therefore, rejecting truth without understanding it is a grave error.

A rational approach towards anything new, whether an invention, or a discovery will help appreciation of every human effort, even outside the pale of religion also. Progress of human knowledge has made it possible to acknowledge all those things, which were once considered fictitious. After this clear declaration of the Qur'ān about the place of human reason and knowledge, mankind tested its truth thrice, once in the age of rhetoricians and logicians of Baghdad in the eighth and ninth centuries, secondly during the renaissance in Europe, and thirdly in this era of science and technology. Debates and discussions do take place, but the victorious factions would be those who are supported by reason and knowledge. We thus see that the plain statement of verse 39 about the place of human intellect can never be improved upon. More details may be perused in my *Muqaddima*.

The Arabic word *tāwīl* stands for end, result and consequence; and in the Qur'ān it is used in its literary sense, for example, we have it in verse 7 of 'Āl-i 'Imrān,' in verse 53 of 'The Heights' and here in verse 39 also. But some commentators took it as a figurative expression, an interpretation, etc., with the result, that they strayed away from the meaning of the Qur'ān. Imām Rāzi's interpretations are remarkable in this respect.

Friends of God - Protection From Fear and Grief

Nothing is more prominent in the Qur'ān than a reference to these qualities of the friends of God as we have in verse 62, stating: "On them shall come no fear nor shall they grieve." Why are they so protected from fear and grief? Freedom from these two really contributes to the felicity of man, whereas one held under its yoke suffers a long life of physical and mental torture, both in this world and in the Hereafter. An investigation into the wickedness and villainy of a person would reveal, that he was after all a victim held in bondage by both fear and grief. Therefore a life of belief in God, declares the Qur'ān, is the road to bliss. This idea is expressed in chapter 103, 'The Time' and in many others also.

CHAPTER XI

HŪD

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1-8

This chapter belongs to the Meccan period of the Prophet's mission; and although its verses are addressed to all those who had declined to accept his message, they are meant to be addressed in particular to the polytheists of Arabia.

The Qur'ān has in various places referred to what had happened in former times to the different sections of mankind and to the divine messages delivered to them in the past. But the manner of reference to each of them and the purpose underlying each reference varies. In this chapter, an account is given of the messages delivered to man by successive Prophets from Noah to Moses. The account is given in chronological order. In the presentation of the historical data concerning the earlier Prophets, this chapter ranks, in the scope of its content, next to the chapter 'Al-A'rāf.'

The chapter begins with the announcement embodied in all divine messages that man should serve or worship none but God. It points out that the Prophet has been charged by God to call upon mankind to abstain from evil, and to offer tidings of a successful life to all those who do good or live aright; and to indulge not in excesses, to seek divine forgiveness for having lived wrongly in the past, and to make it clear to one and all that retribution always overtakes those who commit evil deeds.

The chapter then proceeds to emphasise that every act of man, however insignificant, is noticed by God; and that even as the tiniest hole wherein the ant takes shelter is not hidden from God, even so the thoughts and deeds of men cannot be kept hidden from Him.

In the name of God, the Compassionate the Merciful.

[1] Alif Lām Rā. Here is a Book whose verses are complete in their form and content and are set forth clearly by One Who is All-Wise and All-Informed.

[2] (It calls upon the Prophet to say to the people around him): "Ye have to serve none except God. Verily I come to you from Him, charged with the task of giving you warning (against wrong-doing) and announcing to you glad tidings (of good results following good deeds).

[3] "And (calling upon you to seek pardon of your Lord and to turn unto Him (in repentance). (Should you do so), the goodly things of life will He give you to enjoy for a term and He will bestow His favour on everyone who deserves His favours. But if you turn away, then, I fear a very trying day of retribution might befall you.

[4] "(Remember) that ye shall ultimately have to return to God and that He hath power over everything.

[5] Mark, (O Prophet!) they cover their breasts that they may hide from what they harbour therein. (But nothing can be hid from God), even when they enshroud themselves in their garments. He knoweth what they hide and what they disclose; for, indeed He knoweth every secret of their breasts.

PART XII

Chapter XI

HUD

(*Contd.*)

Mark! Every word of the Qur'ān is invested with some significant import. The central theme round which the entire chapter revolves is the subject of the result which inevitably follows every human action. Note the very first verse of this chapter. It proclaims in the first instance that the Qur'ān is a book whose verses are complete in their form and content. It then goes on to affirm that the verses of the Qur'ān are set forth clearly by One Who is All-Wise and All-Informed. The verse makes it clear that since God is All-Wise, He has clearly laid down a definite law to regulate life—a law which lets every action produce a specific result. It also makes it clear that God is not only All-Wise, but that He is All-Informed: so much so, that nothing can escape His notice and that nothing done by man can ever fail to produce a reaction natural to it. Verse 5, therefore emphasises, that however much one may hide his actions from fellow-men, he can never let them escape the notice of God.

Verse 7 states that in the beginning, the Seat of Divine Authority "had spread over the waters." In another place, (Q. 21 : 30), the Qur'ān states, that the earth in an early stage of its formation was spread over with water, or with something like water, wherein were at work certain forces projected by God.

> [6] There is nothing that moveth on earth,
> the nourishment of which doth not depend
> on God. He knoweth the haunts of
> every moving object and its final resting place.
> All this is noted in the luminous Book of life.
>
> [7] And He it is Who hath projected
> the heavens and the earth in six
> stages while His Seat of Authority had
> spread over the waters (and this He
> did) that He might test which of you excels
> in good deeds. And (O Prophet!) if you
> shouldst say to them: "After death

ye shall surely be raised again," those who do
not believe in your message will
certainly exclaim : "This is nothing
but an alluring idea."

[8] And if We defer the chastisement
they deserve, they will exclaim ;
"What is that keepeth it back ?"
Mark ! It will come upon them suddenly
at a time when there shall be none to
avert it from them : so much so
that what they had scoffed at, shall press
them from every side.

SECTION 2 : VERSES 9-24

Verse 9 refers to psychological aspect of human behaviour. Whenever some trouble overtakes man, he feels depressed, and whenever anything happens to bring him joy, he feels secure in it and grows indifferent to the responsiblities of life. Verse 11 however gives the picture of those who do not belong to such a category of people. They are those who, by living aright, have developed the sense of steadiness in life, and who neither feel depressed whenever a calamity befalls them nor grow forgetful of their responsibilities in life or in other words, forgetful of God, in their moments of joy.

The above observation is made by the Qur'ān for the reason that at a stage in the mission of the Prophet, he had to witness, on the one hand, his detractors laughing at his announcement of dire chastisement awaiting the evil-doers, and on the other, the followers of the Prophet falling into a state of depression consequent on the ill-treatment meted out to them by the unbelievers. The Qur'ān, therefore, had to make it clear that the state of mind depicted above of the unbelievers was but natural to them, being the result of unbelief. But it should not behove the believers to feel dejected or depressed in moments of trial and tribulation.

Of all the utterance which one may make before a people living in comfort and in utter disregard of any dangers to their security no announcement will heregarded more pucrile and absurd, as the one which tells them that they are soon doomed to destruction, unless they abstain from their evil way of living. It will require an extraordinary talent of forbearance and patience to bear the slander and bowling that will be hurled by the perverse among the people addressed, at the person who could make such an announcement of the coming doom. It is indeed a serious responsibility that has to be discharged in a matter of this nature. The Prophets whose mission it was to deliver a message from God, and necessarily to bear this burden, were unmindful of the violent reaction they were to face in consequence. Indeed, such was the serious role in life which they had to discharge in the name of their Lord. It is why, the Prophet of Islam is called upon by the revelations, delivered to him from time to time never to be disheartened by the malicious behaviour of his detractors, but to pursue his mission steadily and with firmness, undeterred by their behaviour. Such is the directive given to him in verse 12 of this chapter. Those who opposed the Prophet in his mission used to taunt him saying: "Wherefore was not a treasure sent down to him or an angel come with him in support of his warning?" Whith reference to such a taunting, the Prophet is asked never to tone down his warning. He is told by the Qur'an, "Thou art only a deliverer of warning from God, and so it is not for thee to suppress any part of it while delivering it; thy task is not to keep any watch over them or force them to accept your message. They are responsible for what they do. Thy task is simply to deliver the message."

By emphasising here the role of the Prophet as a warner, the Qur'an makes it clear, that the Prophet is not sent by God to distribute wealth or work strange miracles. His task is just to show them the way to right living, and warn them of the consequences of wrong living.

The opponents of the Prophet, on hearing the verses of the Qur'ān recited before them, used to laugh at the Prophet saying, that they were of his own device. Verse 13 gives an answer to such an accusation. It calls upon his accusers to produce even a few verses of the same type, even with the aid of those whom they set up as peers for God.

The Qur'ān then points out to the opponents of the Prophet, that they should not pride themselves on the fact that despite the wicked lives they live, they are, in the worldly sense, a prosperous people. It also tells the believers at the same time, that they should not wonder at the prosperity the unbelievers enjoyed despite their wicked lives. They should remember that a law of cause and effect or a law of returns is at work in life. It is that every act of man produces a corresponding result. If any one, forgetful of the demands of the life Hereafter, is engrossed in unhealthy worldly pursuits, he will certainly reap the result thereof. But such a person will have no share in the life Hereafter, since he had done nothing to deserve it, nor had worked for it, in the life present.

[9] And if We let man enjoy any blessing
from Us and then withdraw it from
him, he will surely fall into despair and
show ungratefulness.

[10] And if (on the other hand),
We let him taste any favour from Us, after
he had gone through some trouble,
he will, (forgetting what had passed on him),
ejaculate: "Lo! my troubles are now
over," and he grows boastful (over his relief).

[11] (As against such a class of
people), there are those who
bear trouble with patience and do the
things that are right. It is for people such

as that, pardon awaiteth (from their
Lord) and also a great reward.

[12] It may be that thou mightest
struggle in the mind, whether (in view of the
severity of the warning to be dealt
to the people), thou shouldst not withhold
(for the time being) a part of what
was revealed to thee for delivery,
specially for fear of their saying: "Wherefore
was not a treasure sent down to him or
an angel come with him in support
of this warning?" But thou shouldst
remember that thou art only a deliverer
of a warning from God, (and so,
it is not for thee to withhold any part of it
while delivering it); and remember
that God is watching over all things.

[13] (You may also be considering that)
they will say that it (the Qur'ān) is
his own device. Say to them: "(If you so
think), then bring of your own
devising ten *sūras* (chapters) like it, and call
whom you can to your aid beside God (to judge
between the two), if ye are men of truth.

[14] "But if those (whom you invoke),
do not respond to your call,
then make it clear to yourselves, that
the Qur'ān has been sent down by God alone,
in all His Wisdom and that there is no God
but He. Will you not then yield to it?"

[15] To those who choose the present
with all its attractions, Our way is
to deal out in full measure what they deserve

for their deeds, and they shall not in
the least be deprived of what they deserve.

[16] These are they for whom in
the next world they shall have
nothing but fire. All that they had wrought
therein (in this world) shall come to naught and
all that they had done shall go to waste.

Verse 17 points out that those, who rest their belief on the evidence of reason and the revelation from God sent to them, through His Prophets, can never be compared to those who have, through their perversity, rejected the message of God. It assures those who follow the right way that they will in due course attain success in life. Verse 18 asks: "Who is more unjust than he who foists a lie on God?" Those who behave in this manner can hardly receive blessings, which will be vouchsafed to those, who have laid their trust in the Word of God and mould their lives in accordance with its directions.

The truth just advanced is explained in the next five verses. Verse 20 emphatically asserts that no one shall ever succeed in blocking the way of truth: for, however great the power a man may exercise on earth, he can never counter successfully the laws of God at work in human life: he will have, soon or late, to collapse before them.

[17] Can any of these people be
compared to any one of those, who rest their
belief on evidence (of reason) vouchsafed
to them by God and endorsed
openly by the revelation through him
(the Prophet), as well as by the Book of
Moses which has preceded him,
which is a book of guidance and mercy?
It is people such as these who have
faith in it (the Qur'ān); but if any one
from among the different sections of the

people rejects it, the recompense assigned to him is fire. So, (O Prophet!) do not grow apprehensive as to the result of thy mission, for the truth (it upholds) is the very truth from thy Lord, although (at the moment) a good many people do not believe in it.

[18] And who is more unjust than he who foisteth a lie on God. They who behave in this manner shall one day be set before their Lord, and they (who are in the know of things) will testify: "These are the people who had foisted a lie on their Lord." Mark! Will not the malison of God rest on such unjust people,

[19] Who prevent others from pursuing the way of God and seek to misrepresent it and decline to believe in a life to come.

[20] These people shall by no means weaken the power on earth (of God) and have no protector for them except God. They shall receive two-fold punishment, since they have grown so hardened in their perversity that they do not pay heed to reason or see things in right perspective.

[21] These are they who have thrown themselves into jeopardy. In fact the very images of fancy, which they had devised against truth have now forsaken them.

[22] Without doubt they shall be in the next world lost to themselves.

[23] But they who shall have believed in God and done

what was right and dutifully submitted
themselves to the will of their
Lord, shall be the inmates of paradise
and therein they shall abide.

[24] Can the two sets of people
one resembling the blind and
the deaf, and the other resembling
those who can see and hear,
stand on the same footing? Will you not
reflect over it?

SECTION 3: VERSES 25–35

Verse 24 is a summing up of all previous teachings. It calls upon man to think over, whether he can place a blind and deaf person on the same level with a person, who is neither blind nor deaf, whether there is no difference between light and darkness, or whether darkness and light are to be held in the same estimation? If there is a difference, it follows that they bear different relations with life.

It is why the verses, which follow verse 24, refer to the happenings in ages gone before, which furnish an argument in support of the view upheld in verse 24. The first event in this series is the prophetic call of Noah.

Noah called upon his people never to bow before any one except God and warned them, that if they did not give up their evil way of living, a dreadful day of chastisement would overtake them. But the leaders among his people disregarded his warning. Only the poor and the depressed among them responded to his call. The detractors of Noah told him that he was just like one of them, a human being, and that there was nothing very extraordinary about him that they should believe in his word. They told him that only the despised among them followed him blindly and that they, therefore, could not join a party in which no distinction was observed, between the respectable people and the scum of the society

Noah told them that it was only through the instrument of man, that guidance from God was afforded to man, and that he could do only that which was possible for him as a human being. He said to them: "You call me a liar. But suppose you had regarded me as a truthful person, would you then have allowed me to employ force in directing you to the right path? Even when the clearest proof of the truth of my mission is furnished by God, I can do nothing to you, should you choose to decline to accept it." He said to them that he would not despise those whom they looked down upon as the very scum of society. Respectability did not depend upon one's worldly possessions, but upon one's right living. Should he despise them, he would be answerable to God for the wrong done to them.

Noah told them that he was there as but a 'messenger of Truth,' and that he did not claim to hold any power over them, nor was he superior to the order of man to which he belonged. Those who were opposed to Noah openly declined to admit the argument advanced by him. Indeed, they challenged him to bring upon them the doom, with which he had threatened them. Then came the revelation to him saying: "Do they say that this (what you have said to them) is of your own devising? Say to them: 'If I have forged it, let the sin of it recoil on me. For my part, I am free from all responsibility for the sin that you commit.' So he asked them to wait for the result.

Noah was then told through a revelation, that there was no use in pursuing the erring among his people to come to the right path. Those who had the talent to appreciate the truth advanced by him had already accepted it; the rest were incorrigible. A Deluge was to overtake them. So, he was advised to construct an ark, for himself and his fold. But when Noah began to construct an ark, his detractors gleefully laughed at what he did. But when the Deluge did occur, Noah betook himself to his ark along with his following. The Deluge was tempestuous and the son of Noah would not join his father and enter the ark, and was consequently drowned in the floods.

At the stage when the son was on the point of drowning, Noah raised his voice to God and cried out, that he was of his family whom protection had been promised by Him. The Divine reply came that his son was not of his family, since he was a wicked person. The reply postulates categorically that salvation cannot be claimed, on the strength of mere genital or blood relationship with any prophet of God, but that, on the other hand, it rests on right belief and action in consonance therewith. Noah had pleaded for his son when he was not aware of the fact that his son was an unbeliever. But when the truth was conveyed to him, he was reconciled to the inevitable.

When the floods slowly subsided the ark of Noah came to rest on the hillock of Jūdi.

The chapter of the Qur'ān entitled 'al-Qamar' refers in its verse 11 to the Deluge, happening as the result of heavy and incessant rains and huge floods in rivers. The account of the incident in the Torah corresponds to the account given in this verse; but it suggests that the floods were also due to sea water rushing forth into the rivers and swelling the floods therein. (Genesis 7: 12).

It may be stated here that Noah had appeared as a prophet in the valley of Tigris and the Euphrates. The two rivers take their rise in the mountains of Armenia, and meet and merge into each other, in the southern Iraq and fall into the Persian Gulf. The mountains of Armenia are situated in that part of it known as Ararat. It is why the mountains from which the two rivers are styled in Torah as the Mountains of Ararat. But the hillock on which the ark of Noah rested on the Deluge subsiding, is called by the Qur'ān as Jūdi. But certain modern commentators of the Torah have identified the hillock of the Jūdi referred to in the Qu'rān as part of the chain of hills situated in Georgia and Ararat. They state that some of the Greek writings of the time of Alexander make mention of this great event. But this is a historic fact that till the eighth century

A.D. there existed on one of these hills a temple known as Ark Temple.

It is not difficult to imagine, how confused would have been the state of affairs in a land, which had been revaged by so great a calamity. Noah and his followers would have felt grave misgivings about their future, in a land so devastated and ruined. But, as stated in verse 48, they were asked to stay on there with confidence, and were promised a life of security and happiness. As for those who had gone against Noah, they were told that they would have for a while the good things of life, but none in the life to follow.

[25] It is a fact that We had sent Noah
to his people (to announce): "Verily, I have
come to you to hold out to you a clear warning,

[26] "(And enjoin) that ye serve
none but God. (Unless you do so) I truly
fear that a dreadful day of chastisement
will overtake you."

[27] Then said the elders among his
people who differed from him: "We
see in thee just a human being like ourselves;
and we find that only the meanest of men
have thoughtlessly followed thee.
Indeed, we see no worth in you to prefer
you above ourselves. In fact, we regard you
(and these who follow you) as liars."

[28] He said; "O my people! Think
over! If I act upon a clear direction
from my Lord Who hath bestowed on me
from Himself the merciful talent of
seeing the right way, a way which you cannot
see for yourselves, does it follow
that I can force you to take to the right
path, when you definitely decline to take to it?

[29] "And O my people! For all that I have been doing (to better your life) I do not seek any return from you in the form of riches. The return of my labour is a matter for God alone to determine. But (bear it in mind) that I shall never forsake those who believe in God (however low in station they may appear to you). They too have to meet their Lord (to whom we have certainly to give account of what we do here): But (my sorrow is that I cannot impress the truth on you since) you are a people who do not care to understand it.

[30] "And O my people! Who will help me to answer God for what I do, were I to forsake them (with whom the criterion of goodness is not your vaunted respectability or position in society but devotion to righteousness)? Will you not therefore reflect over it?

[31] "And I do not tell you that I have with me the treasures of God, nor do I tell you that I know things unseen, or that I am an angel: nor do I say of those whom you look upon with scorn that God will not bestow anything good on them; God alone knoweth best what is in their minds. If I should do (what you would like me to do), I should then indeed be acting unjustly."

[32] They said: "O Noah! Thou hast disputed with us and disputed very tenaciously, (but these disputes will not settle the issue between us). Better thou bring

upon us what thou hast threatened
us with, if thou art true to thy word."

[33] He said: "God will certainly bring
it on you if God so wills it, and it is
not in you to cross Him in the least.

[34] "And if God hath willed to let you
suffer in consequence, no amount
of counsel from me will profit you, however
much I may counsel you aright. Remember
that it is He Who is your Lord, and to
Him are you to return."

[35] (Said God, O Noah!), "Do they say
that this (what you have said to them) is of
your own devising? Say to them:
'If I have forged it, let the sin of it recoil
on me: for my part, I am free from all
responsibility for the sin that you commit.'"

SECTION 4: VERSES 36–49

[36] And it was revealed unto Noah:
"It is now clear that none of thy
people will believe in thee except those
who have already done so. Therefore be not
thou grieved over what they do.

[37] "But build thou an ark under Our
very eye and in accordance with Our directions,
and do not plead with Me for those who
have done evil deeds, since they are
doomed to be drowned."

[38] So, he began to build an ark; and
whenever the prominent among his
people passed by him, they scornfully laughed
at him. Noah used to say to them:
"You may laugh at us; we too
will laugh at you even as you do.

[39] "And in the end you shall know
on whom shall the punishment come to shame
them, a punishment such as shall last."

[40] At length, Our Decree came to pass and
water gushed forth from the earth.
We then said (to Noah): "Carry into it
(the ark) one pair of every kind and
thy family also, except him on
whom sentence had already been passed, and
all those who have believed in God."
But the believers with him were but few.

[41] And he said (to his companions):
"Embark ye in it, may God direct its course,
and its mooring. Without doubt
God will overlook our weakness,
and be Merciful to us."

[42] And the ark moved on with them
amid waves appearing mountain-high;
and Noah called to his son
who was standing apart: "Embark
with us, O my son, and do not
stay away with the unbelievers."

[43] He (Noah's son) replied:
"I will betake me to a mountain that shall
secure me from the flood." He said:
"None is secure this day from the Decree of
God except him on whom rests
the Mercy of God." And a wave rushed forth
between them, and he was among the drowned.

[44] And the Divine Command issued
forth: "O earth, swallow up thy water,
and O sky, cease pouring!"

And the flood abated, and the Decree
was fulfilled: and the ark settled down on Jūdi.
And it was said: "Perish the wicked."

[45] And Noah called on his Lord and said:
"O Lord, my son is of my family and
Thy promise always holds good; for,
Thou art the strictest of those
who abide by their decisions."

[46] He said: "O Noah! (My promises
always held good), but he (thy son)
is not of thy family; in this thy
attitude is not correct. Do not plead before Me
in a matter of which thou hast no real
knowledge. I do not wish thee to
be counted among the ignorant."

[47] He said: "O my Lord! In thee do
I truly seek refuge from asking of
Thee anything of which I have no knowledge.
Unless Thou forgive me and show mercy,
I shall indeed be counted among the lost."

[48] It was said (to him): "O Noah!
Get down from thy ark with peace from
Us and blessings on thee, and
on those who are with thee; but to others
(who do not believe in thee), will
We give them good things in this world
but in the hereafter a grievous chastisement
from Us shall light on them."

[49] This is one of the facts kept
back from the knowledge of man.
We now reveal it to thee since neither
thou nor thy people knew it before this.
Hold yourself in patience and do not
grieve over the behaviour of those who do not

believe in thee. The final end
(of this struggle) will be
in favour of the righteous.

SECTION 5: VERSES 50-60

It was among the people of 'Ād that Hūd appeared as a prophet.

He asked them to worship none but God, since there was none other than He Who was worthy of worship. Their beliefs and actions were in conflict with truth. He declared to them that he desired no reward from them, for the service he was anxious to render to them. It was the sense of duty that impelled him to come out before them, to show them the path of rectitude and prosperity.

His people, however, declined to yield to his advice. They said to him that no argument of his would convince them, that they were in the wrong. They were certain that they would not give up the worship of their own deities. They said that they feared, that some deity of theirs has struck him in some grievous manner and that was the reason why he talked so ill of them.

Hūd said to them that he had nothing to do with their deities who certainly had no power to harm him. They and their deities might conspire to hurt him. But they could not do any harm to him. On the other hand, if they should persist in wrong living they would suffer the consequences thereof for, such was the law of life fixed by God. Another race of men would be raised by Him to replace those who persistently declined to listen to the voice of truth.

So it happened. Those who had believed in the word of truth and had acted aright survived in the catastrophe which overtook the people of 'Ād. The rest who had gone against it and continued to live wrongly came to a miserable end.

The significance of the expression "God who is not only my Lord but your Lord as well" occurring in verse 56 needs to

be noted. Those who were given to idolatry or the worship of demi-gods, did not deny the existence of a Supreme Being or God Who was the overlord of all beings and had control over everything. But they believed at the same time that there were certain beings functioning under the supreme God, with certain powers severally assigned to them, and therefore, needed also to be worshipped at their level. The plea of Hūd was that he rested his faith only in that Supreme Being whose existence the idolaters themselves had to admit in their own way.

Verse 59 points out that the people of 'Ād having lived under the yoke of tyrants like the Pharaohs of Egypt, who had claimed the prerogative of divinity, were prone to listen to the word of the tyrants more readily than to the advice of prophets of God who desired them to live righteously by acknowledging His supremacy in everything. Such people were bound to perish.

The use of the plural, 'prophets,' is significant. The people of 'Ād had declined to yield to the advice of Hūd. But they failed to realise that what he had preached, was exactly what all other prophets had preached: the Divine call for righteous living being common to everyone of them. To disregard the advice of one prophet was to disregard the advice of all other prophets.

[50] And unto 'Ād did We send Hūd
one of their own kin. He said to them:
"O my people! Serve God,
ye have no God to serve except Him.
You are simply creating baseless
obstacles (in the way of truth).

[51] "O my people! I ask of you no
return for this (the service I am
rendering you): my recompense is with
Him Who has fashioned me. Will you not
then appreciate (what I say)?

[52] "And O my people! Ask
forgiveness of your Lord! Then in contrition
turn towards Him. He will send on
you copious rain from above and
carry you forward from strength to strength
increasing; do not repay him in evil deeds."

[53] They said: "O Hūd! Thou hast
not brought us any clear proofs
(of thy mission). We will not give up
our deities at thy mere bidding,
and in fact we do not believe thee.

[54] "We can only say that one of our
deities hath struck you in some grievous manner,
(and it is why you talk so ill of them)."
Said he: "I take God to witness and
do ye also notice, that I do not hold myself
responsible for your setting up peers for God.

[55] "You may conspire against me
as you will, and give me no
quarter (and see what happens).

[56] "On my part, I continue to lay
my trust in God Who is not only
my Lord but your Lord as well.
There is no being, which God doth not hold
by its forelock (or exercise absolute control).
Truly right is the way my Lord goeth.

[57] "But if ye turn back, I have
already declared to you the mission on which
I have been sent to you.
(I can do nothing more, if you do not
alter your ways of life), my Lord
will raise another race of men to replace you,
and you shall then hurt Him not in
the least. Mark! My Lord
keepeth watch over all things."

[58] And when Our Decree (of doom) came to pass, We rescued Hūd in Our Graciousness and those along with him, who had believed in him. We indeed rescued them from a grievous catastrophe.

[59] This is the story of the tribe of 'Ād, who had wilfully denied the signs of their Lord, and gone against His messengers, and yielded to the bidding of every hardened opponent (of truth).

[60] A curse therefore will rest on them in this world, as well as on the day of Resurrection. Behold! Surely the 'Ād, the people of Hūd, had to be cast away (in consequence).

SECTION 6: VERSES 61-68

Prophet Ṣāleḥ appeared among the people known as Thamūd. He too had called upon them to serve God alone beside whom they had none worthy of worship. He asked them to consider who had created them out of the earth, indeed from an essence of it, and let them dwell on it. Who could it be but the Nourisher of all that there was in the universe? If so, was He not entitled to their devotion? He, therefore, called upon them to desist from evil living and turn to God in repentance. They told him that they had expected him to be their friend and leader, and help them in the way of their forebears. Instead, it was a matter of deep sorrow to them to see, that he was condemning the way of life, which their forebears had lived, and was trying to turn them away from it.

It has been observed in the course of history, that whenever a man of genius is born among any people, great hopes are raised in their minds, that he would bring glory to them. But the moment he begins to criticise their way of living, they turn their

back on him, and cry out that their hopes were misplaced, as if it was a crime in their view to call upon them to live right.

Prophet Ṣāleḥ asked them to consider; whether it was a disservice to any people if any one from among them, who was endowed with knowledge and insight, should point out to them, that the life they lived was not righteous? Was he there just to please them, by failing to let them know what really was good for them? Who would save him, he said, if he refused to obey the command of God, and failed in his duty to communicate to his people, the word of truth delivered to him in their interest? He said he would be ruining himself if he did that.

His people, however, did not pay heed to his call in a very large number. They all had to suffer in consequence excepting the few, who had responded to his call and mended their way of living.

The reference to the prophets Hūd and Ṣāleḥ given in the Qur'ān is but brief, since both of them had appeared among the Arabs and their story was well known to them.

The reference to the she-camel mentioned in verse 64 has already been explained in verse 73 of chapter 'Al-A'rāf.'

[61] Even unto Thamūd did We send Ṣāleḥ,
one of their kin. He said to his people:
"O my people! Serve God:
there is for you no other God but He.
He hath raised you up out of the earth and
provided facilities for you to dwell
therein. Ask of Him then forgiveness
(for having gone astray till now),
and turn towards Him. Remember, that
my Lord is so close to everyone, that He is ever
ready to respond to every call.

[62] They said: "O Ṣāleḥ! Till now
we had fixed our hopes on thee.

(It being so), dost thou forbid us today
to serve those, whom our fathers
were accustomed to serve?
Truly we look upon with suspicion
the faith, to which thou callest us."

[63] He said: "O my people!
Think over! When I have rested on a
clear evidence from my Lord
(to support me) and when He hath accorded
His Graciousness to me, who would help me
against Him, if I should go against
His Command? Your concern for me
will only add to my worries.

[64] "And O my people! This she-camel
dedicated to God, is a symbol of my mission,
a determining factor for you.
Let her go about freely to pasture in God's
earth, and cause her no harm lest a
speedy punishment overtake you."

[65] Yet they hamstrung her.
Then said he: "Ye have but three days
more to enjoy yourselves in your
dwellings. This warning will
certainly not go unfulfilled."

The Qur'ān now refers to the mission of Prophet Lot, and to the manner in which the inhabitants of the city of Sodom met their doom. It is stated in the Torah that Prophet Lot was a nephew of Abraham and son of Haran. He had accompanied Abraham from the city of Ūr and eventually settled down in Sodom. Since the doom that was to overtake Sodom had been prophesied to Abraham, the account of it begins with a reference to him.

The account runs, that two angels had come to Abraham to inform him of two things. One was that the people of Lot would perish. The other was that a son by name Isaac would be born to Sarah, his wife, and that Isaac would beget Jacob.

Apparently there was no natural connection between the two prophesied events but in reality it was not so. When Abraham and Lot settled down in Palestine, they were strangers to it. But it has already been decreed by God that their progeny would one day rule over it. The story of their progeny begins with Israel or Jacob, son of Isaac. Of the two coming events, of which a fore-knowledge had been given to Abraham, by the two angels referred to above, one was of prosperity attending on good living, and the other of suffering resulting from evil living. One referred to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah resulting from the evil living of the people therein, and the other to the rise of a generation of people, who as a result of their righteous living, would rule over the country. So it happened. While the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had to face ruin in consequence of their evil deeds, Sarah, who had lost all hopes of having any issue, gave birth to a child, who was to be the progenitor of a race of men, who were to shine in glory for centuries together.

[66] When Our Decree came to pass,
We rescued on that day in Our
Graciousness Ṣāleḥ, and those along with him,
who shared his faith, from ignominy.
Verily (O Prophet) thy Lord,
He is Strong, Mighty.

[67] And a violent tempest shook
the wicked, and they were in the morning
found in their dwellings lying
prostrate on their faces,

[68] As though they have never
dwelt therein. Remember! The Thamūd
had indeed denied their Lord;

Surely. the Thamūd had to be
cast away (in consequence).

SECTION 7: VERSES 69–83

[69] And it is a fact that Our
messengers came to Abraham with glad
tidings. They greeted: "Peace on thee."
He greeted (in return): "Peace on ye."
And presently did he bring before them
a roasted calf (and laid it before them
since he felt that they were his guests).

[70] And when he saw that
their hands did not touch it,
he felt suspicious. They said: "Do not
feel apprehensive; we are but sent
(by God) to the people of Lot."

[71] And his wife who was standing by
burst out into laughter. Then did
We announce to her the good tiding of her
having a son (to be named) Isaac, and
of Isaac having a son (to be named) Jacob.

[72] She said: "Ah me! Can I
bear a child when I am so old and
when this, my husband, is also an old man?
This indeed will be a marvellous thing to happen!"

[73] They said: "Marvellest thou at
the Will of God? May God's Mercy and
Blessings be upon you! O people of
this house (of Abraham, this is not
impossible for God to bring about). Surely
deserving of praise is He, the Glorious.

[74] And when the fear of Abraham
passed away on these glad tidings

reaching him, he tenderly pleaded with Us for the people of Lot.

[75] Verily Abraham was of a forbearing nature, of a kindly disposition, and easily relenting.

It may be stated that Prophet Abraham had two wives—Sārah and Hājirah. By Hājirah, he had a son, Ismā'il. He had no issue by Sārah for so long, that she had despaired of having any. It was in this state of despair, that she received a glad tiding from above of having a son. Isaac was the son she gave birth to.

In Torah (Genesis 19:23) it is given that Abraham repeatedly prayed to God, that the doom, that was to befall the people of Sodom, might graciously be averted. He knew that the vast majority of the Sodomites were wicked. But he felt that there might yet be a few, at least ten in number, who were righteous in their living. So he prayed that for their sake, the city might be saved. But the divine answer came to him, that there were not even ten among them who were righteous. Verse 74 of the chapter has a reference to this. God did appreciate his tender concern for the people of Sodom. But it was made clear to him, that the decree of doom could not be withdrawn. The hour for its execution had actually arrived.

The passage refers to the arrival of certain messengers to Lot. But Lot felt worried over their arrival, since the people of Sodom, were in the habit of seizing youthful strangers coming to their town and forcing them to yield to their evil desires.

In the chapter 'Al-A'rāf.' an account is already given, of how Prophet Lot had tried to persuade the people of Sodom to give up their evil ways, and to take to righteous living, and how his advice was disregarded by them. Verses 81 and 82 of this chapter give a picture of the doom, which befell them in consequence. In this catastrophe all the inhabitants of the city perished, except Lot and his loyal followers.

[76] (The messengers said): "O Abraham! Desist from this pleading! Verily the Decree of thy God hath already been issued, and verily a chastisement not to be averted is coming on them."

[77] And when Our messengers came to Lot, he was distressed (by their coming) and his hearts felt straitened on their account and he said: "This is a dreadful day."

[78] And his people came rushing on towards him (having heard of the arrival of these new comers), for they were already addicted to a wicked practice. He said: "O my people! These my daughters (the womenfolk of my town whom you have discarded) should be more acceptable to you, and be regarded as proper for you, and so (you should turn to them to satisfy yourselves instead of taking to evil practices). Fear God then, and do not put me to shame, by attempting to misbehave with my guests. Is there no right minded man among you."

[79] They said: "Thou knowest that we do not care for your daughters, and knowest full well what exactly we require."

[80] Said Lot: "Would that I had strength to resist you or had some powerful support to fall back upon."

[81] The messengers said: "O Lot, verily we are the messengers of thy Lord. We know that they can never touch thee. (Thou do this). Depart

from here with thy family in the dead of
night. Let none of you turn back.
As for your wife, (who will stay away
of her own accord), on her shall light what
shall light on others. The hour of
doom that awaiteth them is the hour of morning.
Is not that hour of morning approaching near ?"

[82] And when We had to execute
Our Decree. We turned upside
down (their city) and We rained down incessantly
upon it blocks of clay-stone,

[83] All marked for this purpose by
thy Lord Himself. And this should bring home
to (other) wicked people (the serious
nature of the consequences that follow
evil living).

SECTION 8: VERSES 84–95

Prophet Shu'aib appeared among the people of Madyan.

The Torah states that Abraham had six children by his wife Ketorah one of them being Madiyān (25:1). It is this Madiyān which is written as Madyan in Arabic. When his descendants settled down on the shore of Red Sea, among whom Prophet Shu'aib appeared, the Israelites called these settlers as Banu Qatura.

Prophet Shu'aib called on these people to serve God alone, saying that besides Him they had no other god.

He asked them to be fair in their business dealings and never to create disorder in the land. He warned them, that their prosperous state of life should not develop in them, the tendency for wrong living, as that would invite on them divine displeasure.

The people of Madyan told Shu'aib, that he was at liberty to pray to God as passionately as he desired. But they asked him whether his devotion warranted, that he should call others to give up their own way of living, specially when that way was the way of their own fathers. They said that they were masters of their own belongings, and were free to sell them in any manner they desired. They taunted him by asking him whether of all the world, he alone was the man of virtue, anxious to pursue fair dealing in trade.

Prophet Shu'aib said to them, that when God had gifted him to see things as they were, and he found that they were going the wrong way, was it not his duty to point this out and show them the way to right living? When God had bestowed on him, all the means of material comfort that he needed, would it not be ingratitude to God, if he were to abstain from serving others, which was a duty expected of him? He, therefore, asked them, why in their dislike of him, they should turn away from the path of truth? He was not calling them to do anything, which he himself would not do for his own good. Why should they then get displeased with him? He had not certainly been appointed to keep watch over them, and force them to do what he liked. He only desired them to reform their way of living. Whatever he aimed to do could only be done with the aid of God. "I lay my trust in Him alone," said he.

> [84] And We sent to (the people of)
> Madyan their brother Shu'aib. He said:
> "O my people! Serve God. There is for
> you no other god but He. Do not give short
> weight and measure. I see you are indeed
> in a prosperous state; (so do not be ungrateful
> to your God, the Giver of all things,
> but you are not proving grateful). So I
> fear for you the chastisement of a day,
> that shall press your hand from every side.

[85] "And O my people!
Give weight and measure with fairness.
Purloin not the goods of other men,
and do not spread disorder in the land
mischievously.

[86] "That which is left to you by
God, is better for you, if only you
have faith in Him. Remember, my
object is (only to offer you fair
counsel and) not to keep a check
on your doings."

[87] They said: "O Shu'aib!
Is it thy prayers which induce you to
say to us, that we should discard
whom our fathers had served, or that
we should not do what we please
with our wealth? Are you the only person
(left among us) to display clemency
and straightforwardness

[88] He said: "O my people! Think
over! When I have depended on a clear
evidence from my Lord, and when He
hath afforded me goodly means
of living, (how can I fail to deliver
His message and call you to
the path of truth?). I do not desire to do myself
what I forbid you to do. I only wish to
reform you to the extent I can, and
the accomplishment of my mission resteth
with God. In Him do I place my trust,
and to Him do I turn for help.

It is pointed out already, that the tribe of Madyan had settled down on the shore of the Red Sea, which to its north touched the shores of the Sinai Peninsula. Since Sinai was the

junction for trade routes from Arabia, Syria and Africa, it had grown into a huge clearing house for commodities of diverse sorts, so much so that, those who lived there were materially a prosperous people (as we have a reference in verse 84).

But prosperity had gradually spoilt their character, with the result, that they began to display dishonesty in their trade dealings. It was why Shu'aib had to call on them to desist from this sin.

The point to note here is, that the leaders among the people of Madyan had developed a hatred for Shu'aib; and hatred of any one is an obstacle, in the way of accepting any truth advanced by him. So it was in the case of Shu'aib. He, however, pleaded with his people not to disregard truth out of any hatred for him. They should accept the truth on its merits.

But his people would not yield to his pleading. They said, they would have stoned him to death, had not his family belonged to their own tribe. He expressed sorrow over what they said. He felt that here were a people, who would show regard for members of their tribe, but would not show it to God. It seemed that God had no value for them. In sheer despair, Shu'aib said to his people to go their own way, and that he would go his own, and wait for the result. When that came, the unruly perished and the staunch in faith were saved.

> [89] "O my people! Let not your opposition to me, draw down upon you the like of that, which befell the people of Noah or the people of Hūd, or the people of Ṣāleḥ; and (do not forget that) what befell the people of Lot is still green in your memory.
>
> [90] "And so seek pardon of your Lord and turn to Him. (Remember that) my Lord is Merciful, Loving."

[91] They said: "O Shu'aib!
We understand not much of what thou sayest
to us, and we clearly see that thou
are but a weakling among us, and were it not
for thy family, we surely would
have stoned thee, for thou hast no power
over us."

[92] He said: "O my people! Is
my family of greater importance to
you than God Himself? Will you relegate
Him into the background, as if
it is a thing deserving of neglect? Verily,
my Lord knoweth full well all that you do.

[93] "And O my people! Try your
power as you may (against me),
and I shall pursue my task as I may,
and ye shall soon know on whom
shall light a punishment, that
shall disgrace him and who in fact
is the liar. Wait ye then
for the result, and I too will surely await
it with you."

[94] When Our Decree came to
pass, We in Our Graciousness rescued
Shu'aib and those along with him
had shared his faith. And a violent
tempest shook the wicked, and they were
in the morning found in their dwellings
lying prostrate on their faces,

[95] As though they had never
dwelt therein. Remember! The people of
Madyan had surely to be cast away
(in consequence), as the Thamūd
had to be cast away.

SECTION 9: VERSES 96-109

In verses 96 to 99, the Qur'ān reverts to the call of Moses to his people and draws attention to what happened to them in the end.

[96] And surely had We sent Moses
with Our Directions and clear authority

[97] To Pharaoh and his nobles,
who followed his behest, and unrighteous
was the behest of Pharaoh.

[98] He (Pharaoh) shall head his people
on the Day of Resurrection and will lead
them into the fire, and evil is the station to
which they are led.

[99] They were pursued by a curse in
this world and on the Day of Resurrection as well.
What a wretched reward is it that
has fallen to their share!

In the opening verses of the chapter, a call had been issued to the people of Arabia to respond to the voice of the truth. They had been warned of the consequences, which necessarily followed a deliberate disregard of it. The Qur'ān had at the same time, made clear to them, the things that really mattered in life. While drawing attention to them, the Qur'ān had made it clear also, that for every one there lay before him but two ways—one of knowledge and insight, the other of ignorance and intellectual blindness. Those who followed the different paths could not reach the same destination. In support of this observation, the Qur'ān brings to mind what had happened to mankind in the past. The account begins with Noah and closes with that of Moses. The rest of the chapter beginning with verse 100 draws attention to the consequences, which followed the actions of those, who had disregarded the call of their prophets. They offer food for reflection:

(a) Whatever calamity which befell the people referred to in this chapter, was not due to any wilful harshness on the part of God. The divine law of requital is charged with justice and mercy. The calamities which befell them were self-imposed. They were deliberately courted by them, in as much as they had discarded the path of good living and taken to that of sheer wickedness, which inevitably led to their ruination.

(b) The divine law of mercy allows respite after respite, in order that men may mend their ways, by giving them time to distinguish between light and darkness. If any people should choose to turn away from light, then the law of life will have its course. The consequence is always painful.

(c) He who can appreciate this fact of life, will readily admit, that there is a law of action and reaction at work in life, and that whatever the prophets of God had delivered to man for his guidance, was based on truth.

(d) In the divine scheme of life, every thing is governed by the law implicit in its nature and for every turn in its operation, there is set specific duration of time. So, everything happens in its own time. The duration of life styled the life Hereafter or the Last Day, necessarily comes at the end of life's journey.

(e) Those who will emerge on that day, or in the life Hereafter with wickedness already embedded in them, will have to meet the consequences of their wickedness, and those who will emerge with goodness dwelling in them, will meet the consequences of their goodness.

(f) Verse 109 is addressed to the Prophet calling upon him not to let the question arise in his mind, why is it that despite the fact, that the polytheists of Arabia are disinclined to give up their polytheism, respite after respite is allowed to them. He is told, that they are but following the ways of their forebears, and are bound to meet in due course, the result of their stubbornness.

He is reminded that before him Moses also had been given the Book. Even in his case, his people did not listen to his advice. The law of life will not operate differently, in the case of the Arab polytheists, in meeting out the result of deeds done by them.

[100] Such is the story which We relate to thee (O Prophet) of certain centres still. Some of these still stand and some have fallen into ruins

[100] We certainly did not deal with them unfairly; it was they who dealt unfairly by themselves. And their deities on whom they used to call beside God, availed them not, when the Decree of thy Lord came to pass. At best, they could but increase their own ruin.

[102] Such was the Grip of thy Lord, when He grips any city that has gone wicked. Verily His Grip is painfully terrible.

[103] Herein truly is a sign of warning for him, who feareth the chastisement of the Day to follow. That shall be a day, when mankind shall be gathered together: that shall be a terrible day to face.

[104] And We do not put it off; but a time is fixed for it.

[105] When that day shall come, no one shall speak a word except by His Leave, and on that day some will feel miserable and the rest happy.

[106] As for those who shall be consigned
to misery, their dwelling place
shall be the Fire, therein shall they
sigh and moan,

[107] Abiding therein while the heavens
and the earth shall last, unless thy Lord
shall will it otherwise. Verily, thy Lord doth
what He willeth.

[108] And as for those to whom
happiness has been assigned—
their dwelling place shall be the Garden,
therein shall they abide, while the
heavens and the earth shall last, enjoying
whatever lasting boon thy Lord
willeth to add.

[109] (O Prophet!) Do not be in
any doubt (in regard to what recompense
they shall have) for serving others besides God.
They may say that they serve their
deities, even as their forebears had done.
But mark! We shall surely pay them
what they deserve, undiminished.

SECTION 10: VERSES 110–123

[110] We gave Moses the Book,
but in respect of it differences arose.
Had not a Decree from thy Lord gone forth
(to afford them respite) surely a
decision would have been taken.
And they are still entertaining disquieting
doubt about it.

[111] And truly will thy Lord
recompense every one of them according to
their deserts: for He is well aware of
what they do.

Now the Qur'ān in verse 112 addresses the Prophet and those of his followers, who had shared his trials and tribulations in the very first phase of his mission. They are told as follows:–

(a) They should staunchly pursue the path laid down for them and go ahead with the task assigned to them.

(b) In their pursuit, they should not exceed their bounds by being harsh and unjust to their opponents, in any manner.

(c) At the same time, they should be careful to see, that they did not yield to their opponents, or entered into any compromise with them, detrimental to the interest of the prophetic mission.

(d) They should observe regularly the prescribed prayers with full knowledge of the implications thereof. Therein lies strength for them. Prayer is intended to keep them away from evil.

(e) They should bear everything with patience. The divine law of life is this that it never lets a good deed go in vain. If they so act, they are bound to be rewarded with success.

(f) They should select a few among them, to go about in the land to call on people, to turn away from evil and take to the path of goodness; for, it was through a dearth of such guides among several communities in the past, which led eventually to their ruination.

(g) Finally, they should bear in mind that differences in opinion do arise in the affairs of men. It is not in the nature of things, that all people should follow but one way of thinking, and that the strife between the true and false should disappear for ever. They should not, therefore, feel despondent over the thought, that a good many of their people are yet not willing to respond to the call of truth. For their part they should persevere in their effort to bring them to good senses.

[112] So then, go straight on
as thou hast been bidden along with those,
having repented, now turn to God in
thy company, and let them not
transgress any more. Remember!
He beholdeth what all ye do.

[113] And lean not on the evil-doers
lest the Fire lay hold on you also.
You have no protector save God,
for ye can have no true
help from anywhere else.

[114] And observe prayer at
early morn, at the close of the day,
and during the early hours of the night.
Remember that things good nullify
things evil. This is a counsel for those,
who care to profit by any counsel.

[115] And patiently persevere
(in righteous activities), for truly, God
doth not let the reward of
the righteous go to waste.

[116] Had there been among the
generations before you, barring
only a few, whom We had saved,
a set of people endowed with the talent to
forbid and prevent wrong-doing on
the earth, the evil-doers among them
would not have gone on following their
selfish pursuits and turn transgressors.

[117] And remember, thy Lord
had not destroyed any centre of
population, where there were among them
a body of persons actively devoted to
the task of reforming.

[118] Had thy Lord pleased,
He would have pressed all mankind to
follow but one way (the straight way).
But the difference will continue among them,
(because of the freedom of
action vouchsafed to man).

[119] Only those deserving of
the Mercy of thy Lord
will not deviate (from the right way)—to
which man hath been created.
(As for those who do not go this way,
the Word of God has already gone
forth) and that will be fulfilled (the word of
warning being), "I will fill
Hell with jinn and men."

Verse 120 draws attention of the Prophet to the trying experiences, through which the prophets of yore had to pass through, in the pursuit of the mission they had been entrusted with, so that, he may hearten himself in the task before him. He, no doubt, was sorrowful over the perverse obstinacy, which his people were showing in rejecting his call to a life of goodness and prosperity. But he should remember, that more distressful was the experience of some of the prophets, who had gone before him. The opposition they had to contend against was indeed greater than what had so far been experienced by him.

But he should, therefore, take a lesson from these annals, and lay his implicit trust in God, and march forward in his purpose in full confidence of inevitable success. Such is the note of hope and trust with which the chapter closes.

[120] And all that We have related to
thee, from the accounts of the previous
apostles is only to strengthen thy heart.
In what has been related,

thou wilt find truth emphasised,
admonition dealt to the unbelievers, and
tidings of good held out to those
who have believed in God.

[121] And (O Prophet!) say to those
who believe not (in thy mission),
"Act as you care to act in your own way:
we will act in our own way.

[122] "And await (the result);
we too will await."

[123] God alone knoweth the secrets
of the heavens and the earth; all
things return to Him. Serve Him only
and put thy trust in Him;
thy Lord is not regardless of what ye do.

Mawlana Azad has added a few notes at the close of his commentary of the chapter, which deal with some of the important issues arising out of a study of the annals of some of the previous prophets referred to in the Qur'ān.

The Annals of Prophets and their Significance

This is one of those chapters of the Qur'ān in which attention is invited to what had happened to prophets in the past. The object is to draw certain lessons from it, as already done in one of the notes given under the chapter, 'Al-A'rāf.' Further exposition of this theme is furnished here.

One of the ways, which the Qur'ān adopts to offer a warning against any line of action in life, is to draw attention to the lessons, of history. The object of referring to the past events in the lives of prophets, as indicated in verse 120 of this chapter, is not just to give any piece of history for its own sake. It is to rouse the conscience of those addressed and to bring home to them certain truths of life. The regret is that our early com-

mentators of the Qur'ān, in their obsession for dialectic exposition of its phraseology missed the true significance of the Qur'ānic references to the events of the past.

The Qur'ān emphatically proclaims that throughout the universe, indeed in every corner of it, there is at work but one law of existence. Its operation has in the different spheres of life assumed different forms, each form being styled differently. But the law at work in every form is but one and the same.

The Qur'ān points out that the law of life which is at work in the world of matter, is also at work in the field of human action, so much so, that everything that one does has necessarily to produce a specific result. It also emphasises that the principle holds good in the activity of nations, even as it does in the activity of an individual. The law has its course irrespective of the country, of the period, of human history in which an action was staged.

Sunnat-Allah

It is this law of life which the Qur'ān styles as *Sunnat-Allah*, or the habit, or the way of God !

> "That was the way of God with those who have gone before: and thou wilt find never a change in the way of God." (Q. 33 : 62).
>
> "Thou shalt not find any change in the way of God—Yea, thou shalt not find any variableness in the way of God." (Q. 35 : 43).
>
> "This was Our way with the apostles We had already sent before; and in this Our way, thou shalt find no change." (Q. 17 : 77).

Deductive Reasoning Natural to Man

The above assertion of the Qur'ān is endorsed by human experience. Man's very nature should induce him to admit that everything is endowed with a certain quality, and it is why he

feels the effect of everything which happens around him, and realises that every cause has its inevitable effect. He feels convinced in his mind, that a thing which produces a certain effect for the first time in his own experience will in similar situations in future produce a like result. It is this deductive reasoning, or the urge to generalise on the basis of repeated experience of a certain thing, which resolves itself into a fixed belief in him. The Qur'ān, therefore, asks men why is it that they decline to accept this law of life in its application to their own affairs, or to their own actions. It brings to their minds the experience of history or what had happened to the people gone before them. They too were once living a prosperous life. But when they fell away from the path of right living, they had to bear the result of what they had done. Indeed, one may go round the world and see for oneself, how many centres of population had come to ruin, due to the iniquities of their inhabitants.

> "Already, before your time, have examples been made! Traverse the earth, then see what hath been the end of those, who had treated (divine revelations delivered through prophets) as lies?" (Q. 3: 137).

> "Have they not travelled in the land and seen what hath been the end of those gone before them, mightier though in strength than they?" (Q. 35: 44).

As already pointed out, a direct appeal to the experience of history is part of the Qur'ānic technique employed to press a point for attention. It may be stated here, that Ibn Khaldūn was among the very first Muslim scholars, to imitate this Qur'ānic technique in his approach to history—a technique, which in a special sense has gone to shape the philosophy of history in modern times.

The Two Realities of Life

The Qur'ān attaches such great importance to the *Sunnat-Allah* at work in every sphere of life, both material and moral,

that wherever it draws attention to the activities of men, individual or collective, it makes it clear that all had happened in human life or will happen in future, good or otherwise, was or will be the result of either in conformity to, or due to neglect of this law, governing life in every corner of the universe or in every thing, that there is in the heavens or in the earth.

Surat Al-Hūd and the Lesson of History

The chapter 'Hūd' is one of those chapters in the Qur'ān, in which the truth of life just referred to is pointedly presented for attention. It makes it absolutely clear that all that had happened in the past, to the bearers of the divine message in different climes and during different periods of history, was set in but a single pattern. If the notes given under the chapter 'Al-A'rāf,' and this chapter are scanned carefully, it will be clear to the readers, that the circumstances under which the different prophets, from Noah to Moses appeared among their people, the forces which they had to contend against, and the methods which they all followed, to bring their people to the right path, and the trials which they had to bear in the process, were similar in each case. None of them possessed either wealth or power. One and all were called to uphold the cause of Truth at a time, when their several peoples were steeped in sin and needed to be brought out of it. The style of address of everyone of these prophets was alike and in each case, the hardened among their peoples took up a hostile attitude towards them, and devised every possible measure to thwart their mission Their one and common call to them was, to serve God alone and worship none beside Him and to desist from evil-living. They clearly pointed out to them, that the way they followed would inevitably lead to ruin, and it was for them to decide things for themselves. The task of the prophets, they said, was simply to warn their people of the evil consequences which follow evil-living, and to announce to them the glad tidings that happiness and prosperity will result from righteous living.

The annals of the prophets as given in the Qur'ān will reveal, that only the poorer classes among their people, the depressed and the oppressed were the first to respond to their call, whereas the arrogant, the perverse, and the wealthy resisted it, and persecuted them in diverse ways. But the law of life—the *Sunnat-Allah*—had its course. Those who took to the right path prospered, and those who had persisted in their wickedness perished. That is the lesson of history, which the Qur'ān emphasises at every turn. That is the inevitable course the *Sunnat-Allah* takes: it never changes or alters for any one.

Ayyām-Allah

The Qur'ān refers to the great moments of history, when the conflict between good and evil was resolved in accordance with the *Sunnat-Allah*, as *Ayyām-Allah*, or the days of Allah or moments decreed by God, when events happen which change the course of history, such as, the delivery of the Israelites by Moses from the yoke of Pharaoh referred to in the following verses 5 and 6 of chapter XIV, 'Abraham.'

> "And certainly did We send Moses with Our signs saying: 'Bring forth thy people from darkness into light and remind them of the moments of Allah (*Ayyām-Allah*).' Verily in this are signs for every patient, grateful person.
>
> And remember the occasion when Moses said to his people: 'Call to mind the kindness of God to you when He delivered you from Pharaoh's people, who had laid on you a cruel affliction, slaughtering your males and suffering your females only to live (as slaves).' "

The *Ayyām-Allah* are moments when the *Sunnat-Allah* asserts itself to let righteousness triumph over evil in a demonstrable form. They are indeed the occasions, when God makes Himself powerfully felt in the affairs of man and are, therefore, remembered by those who come after.

The Qur'ānic Stories

The chapter rounds up its reference to the annals of the prophets in verse 120 in the following manner:

> "And all that We have related to thee, from the accounts of the previous apostles, is only to strengthen thy hearts. In what has been related, thou wilt find truth emphasised, admonition dealt to the unbelievers, and glad tidings held out to those who have believed in God "

The annals of the prophets given in the Qur'ān offer to man lessons of deep significance. They draw attention to a good many truths of life and disclose to him the significance to his life of the *Ayyām Allah* or the great moments in human history. This is not the place to expatiate at length on the various issues which arise in this connection. The purpose here is just to indicate them and emphasise, that in every aspect of human activity, there is but a single law at work producing uniform results. The annals of the prophets make clear certain things:

(i) They point to the fact, that in every part of the world and among every people, there had appeared among them, at one stage or another, outstanding personalities who, one and all had offered to their people, a uniform style of advice calculated to promote their well-being.

(ii) The message of righteous living, which these personalities delivered, through different languages among different peoples in different ages, was by its nature one and the same.

(iii) The method followed by these personalities or prophets in delivering their common message to their peoples, was also uniformly the same.

(iv) The problems which faced every prophet were of a like nature in every case.

(v) The experiences which these prophets had to undergo in the course of their missions, or the reactions to their teachings, were also of one and the same pattern.

(vi) The attitude displayed by those, who had accepted the call of the prophets was in each case the same, as also the counter attitude of those who had rejected it.

(vii) The results which followed a hearty acceptance of the Truth advanced by the prophets, were the same in every case, even as the contrary results which attended on total rejection.

When such are the facts, of life demonstrated by history, is it difficult to believe, asks the Qur'ān, that there is at work in human life and in all its activities, an eternal law of life, which operates without a change and to which one has to conform, if one is to live a life of peace and prosperity.

The function of *waḥī* or divine revelations has been to draw attention to this law of life, which is at work in the sphere of matter, as well as, in that of human beliefs and their expression in action. A tacit conformity to it, as advised by the prophets of God, has always produced good results. Likewise, a disregard of it has produced results injurious to the well-being of man. The law has never varied.*

Why has the Qur'ān referred to the Work only of a few Prophets

The Qur'ān declares that the advent of His message-bearers was not restricted to the communities or the people mentioned therein. The privilege was extended to all peoples and all parts of the world. The names of only a few are however given and the names of a good many of the rest are known only to God

> "And every people hath had its apostle; and when their apostle appeared, things were settled among them justly and they were not wronged." (Q. 10: 47)

* The subject is so vast in its implications that only a cursory view of it has been presented here. For an exhaustive treatment of it, the reader will have to await the publication of the *Muqaddima* or the Prolegomena to the *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*. (The plan of the *Muqaddimma*.as conceived by Mawlana Azad, it is sad to state, could not be executed during his life-time. (S A.L.)

> "Thou art only a warner; and every people hath had its guide." (Q. 13: 7)

> "And to every people have We sent an apostle saying: 'Worship God alone and turn away from *ṭāghūt* (evil)." (Q. 16: 36).

> "Verily, We have sent thee with the truth; and as a bearer of good tidings and a warner. There hath been no people to whom a warner had not come." (Q. 35: 24)

The Qur'ān while stating that "every people hath had an apostle," has made it clear that it has not given an account of every one of them.

> "And already We sent apostles before thee: of some We have told thee, and of others We have not told thee anything." (Q 40: 78).

Why then the Qur'ān made mention of but a few apostles? The answer is clear. The Qur'ān is not a book of history that it should give a chronological account of all the prophets. Its main object is to draw attention to the fact that the experiences through which the prophets went through, were all of a set pattern in every case. Towards this end. only a few have been selected for presentation.

The question will, no doubt, arise; Why the specimens have been selected, from out of those prophets only who had appeared among the people of a particular area, namely, the land of the Semites—Arabia and the countries lying immediately to its north? The answer to this question is plain enough. The Arabs, among whom the Qur'ān was delivered, would probably have felt puzzled, if lessons had been drawn for their admonition, from the accounts of the people of whom they had no knowledge Those of whom mention has been made in the Qur'ān were people, who all belonged to the countries adjoining the land of the Arabs, and with whom the Arabs had racial and historic

affinities and long standing trade relations. The names of their prophets were therefore, more or less, known to the Arabs of the Prophet's time. In fact, good many of them, known as the Jews and the Christians, were to be found in good numbers in almost every centre of population in Arabia. This is the reason, why the Qur'ān has had to confine its attention to what had happened to their prophets, whose names were not unfamiliar to the average Arab, or whose centres of activity in the past were not unknown to him. That the Arabs were aware of the names of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān, and of what had happened to their people for rejecting the message delivered by them, is clear from the manner of address employed by the Qur'ān while drawing lessons from their annals:

> "Has not the account reached you of those who had gone before?" (Q. 14:9)

> "Have they never travelled in the land and seen what was the end of those who flourished before them?" (Q. 36:44).

The Qur'ān also asks the Arabs; whether they had not heard of the earlier prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān, from the learned among the Jews and the Christians, who lived among them. In fact, it reminds them that some of the events mentioned in the Qur'ān had occurred in their very vicinity.

> "Of old too, did We destroy the towns which wer round about you, and varied Our Signs that they might return (to Our right path)." (Q. 46:27)

Of course, not all the Arabs were aware of every detail of the events referred to in the Qur'ān. This was true of even others of the time. In fact, some of the events mentioned in the Torah had either been forgotten or remembered but vaguely, even by the people of the Book (the Jews and the Christians): so much so, that the Qur'ān had to state them afresh

to revive their memory. Indeed, referring to certain facts of past history mentioned in the Qur'ān, as for instance, the details of the history of Noah, this chapter points out in verse 49, that neither the Prophet himself nor his people had hitherto any knowledge whatsoever.

Modern Research and the Ancient Communities referred to in the Qur'ān

The factual historic material touching the different places mentioned in the Qur'ān, was not within the knowledge of the Arabs nor even to others, in any proper form, till the 18th century when the results of modern archaeological research could disclose it piecemeal. The horizon of this knowledge has since gone on extending. The facts of history thus brought to light give us a vivid picture of the ancient past of Arabia, Iraq, Palestine, Syria, and Egypt. The fact emerges that the terms 'the race of the Arabs' and 'the language of the Arabs' are not terms restricted in their application only to the people, who today live in Arabia but were applicable to a number of people, who had dwelt in West Asia in ancient times, known differently as Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syrians, Phoenicians and the rest, who severally had contributed to the different civilizations, which had flourished successively in that part of the world, all belonged to but one stock. They popularized their common script among people who belonged to. other races. One may read even today, the Arabic words incorporated in the inscriptions of the time of Darius and also in the hieroglyphic writings of ancient Egypt. It is also admitted now, that even the Greek script, was in its initial growth influenced in a way by the original Arabic script.

Who can say what further researches are to reveal? But whatever has been disclosed till now makes it clear, that those who had flourished in this part of the world in ancient times belonged to but one stock, and that it was out of this stock that

the different tribes of the Arabs existing at the time of the Prophet had taken their rise. In this connection several things call for attention:

(i) The significance attached to the mention of these communities in the Qur'ān is not just this, that they had lived in the vicinity of Ḥijāz or that they were known to the Israelites of the Prophet's time. In fact, the significance appears to be deeper, since they seemed to have all belonged to but one stock. Even the Egyptians whose mention is made in the Qur'ān are to be treated as an offshoot of this very stock.

(ii) In the light of this knowledge the order of reference made by the Qur'ān to these several communities becomes intelligible. The story of the people of Noah is given first, and then of the 'Ād, and lastly that of the Ṯhamūd, making it clear that one had succeeded the other. In verse 69 of 'Al-A'rāf', it is stated, that Prophet Hūd said to his people that they should be thankful to God for having made them to succeed the people of Noah. Likewise, in verse 74, Prophet Ṣāleḥ said to his people, that they were successors to the people of 'Ād. Since the three communities flourished in different geographical areas, it was not possible to understand how one could be regarded as successor to the other. Now that the statements of these prophets have become intelligible, in the light of the knowledge of these communities afforded to us, by the results of recent researches, we need not be carried away by the conjectures offered in this regard by the early commentators of the Qur'ān.

(iii) The knowledge gained by means of the recent researches throws a light also on the question, why the Qur'ān should have begun the account of prophets with the story of Noah. Various views had in the past been advanced in answer. But as a result of the researches one thing becomes clear, and it is that Noah was probably the first prophet to appear amongst these people. That is evidently the reason why the Qur'ān begins the annals of the prophets, with a reference to the mission of Noah.

(iv) As a result of these researches, the division that had so far been made of the semitic peoples and of their linguistic variations will have to be revised.

A reference made in this chapter to the deluge of the time of Noah deserves to be commented upon. In Torah, the idea is advanced that this deluge was world-wide. In fact, the researches referred to above have made it absolutely clear, that the event was confined to but a specific geographical unit, where Prophet Noah had appeared. Curiously the Biblical idea proceeding from the Book of Genesis, was commonly believed in by the Jews and the Christians alike, and it was unthinkingly believed in by the followers of the Qur'ān as well, although the Qur'ān does not lend support to the idea that the deluge was world-wide. It is now made absolutely clear that the event was confined to but a specific geographical unit where Prophet Noah had appeared. It is also made clear that the narration of events given in the Book of Genesis is of an apocryphal character. The subject will be reverted to in detail in the *Muqaddima.**

Nineteenth Century Research and the Israelite History

The archaeological and other researches of the 19th century do not furnish any data, touching the accounts given both in the Bible and the Qur'ān, of the activities in Egypt of either Joseph or Moses. In fact, the very story of the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt and of their subjection by the Pharaohs, is scarcely traceable in the historic material brought to light by the researches carried on in Egypt. It may be noted here, that few communities of ancient times, were so careful as the Egyptians in preserving their writings, or anything of importance to them. It being so, it is surprising, that an event to which so much importance has been attached by the Bible as well as by the Qur'ān, namely, the rescuing of the Israelites from the yoke of the Pharaohs, should have gone unnoticed by the chroniclers of Egypt. The

* See footnote 1 at page 190.

fact is, that prior to the invention of papyrus in Egypt, it was the custom of the Egyptians to inscribe important events of their life on the walls of their temples, palaces and tombs. Thereafter, when paper came into use, regular accounts were written down of every important aspect of their history, so much so, that today we have before us a comprehensive history of ancient Egypt. Not merely this, so deep was their attachment to the way of their living, that whenever a king of theirs or any important personage amongst them died, care was taken to preserve his body in his tomb along with an account of events with which he was connected. Bodies so preserved are now-a-days known as mummies.

The knowledge of the past thus furnished takes us back to events which had occurred five thousand years ago. This together with the early Greek writings, gives us a picture of this part of the world, from 3000 B C. right up to the time of Alexander the Great. During this long period, as many as thirty-one dynasties ruled over Egypt. The last in the series was that of the Imperial Dynasty of Persia. The Persian hold over Egypt terminated with the conquest of it by Alexander in 332 B.C.

The research scholars who have brought to light so vast a knowledge of ancient Egypt, are greatly surprised at the fact that they could not so far trace any material, which might substantiate the great Biblical account of the delivery of Israelites, from the yoke of Pharaoh in the time of Moses. According to the Biblical chronology of events, Joseph should have lived in Egypt during the dynastic rule of Hyksos ('Amāliqa) and Moses should have appeared in Egypt during the regime of the twentieth dynasty of Pharaoh. But in the material collected so far relating to these two dynasties, there is hardly anything, which might be connected with either Joseph or Moses. It is why the historians of the twentieth century feel reluctant to give credence to the Biblical narration touching them.

But the question needs consideration. Are we to take the account of Egypt's past, furnished by the archaeological research as the last word on the subject? Is there no further research in the field possible? These are important questions which will be taken up for detailed discussions in the *Al-Bayān*.*

* This work was planned by Mawlana Azad but could not be executed during his life time. (S. A. L.).

CHAPTER XII

JOSEPH—YUSUF

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1-6

This is one of the chapters which were delivered at Mecca during the first phase of the Prophet's mission. It is an account of what happened to Prophet Joseph.

In the previous chapter, it has been stated that Abraham had received the glad tidings from God that he would beget a son, who in his turn would beget a son, and that his progeny would increase in number and prosper (Q. 11 : 71). Accordingly, Isaac was born to Abraham, and Jacob to Isaac. Jacob had twelve sons—six by his wife Leah, namely Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun ; two by Bilah, namely, Dan and Naphtali; two by Zilpha, Gad and Asher, and two by Rachel namely Joseph and Benjamin.*

Joseph and Benjamin were the youngest. Their mother died soon after giving birth to the second son, Benjamin.

It is mentioned in the *Torah* that there existed acute rivalry between Leah and Rachel, the two wives of Jacob, and this was reflected in the behaviour of their sons. Jacob was particularly fond of Joseph and this was galling to his stepbrothers (Genesis 37 : 4). It was why Jacob had warned Joseph not to speak of the dream that he had dreamt (as in verses 3 to 5 of this chapter).

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* The order in which the wives of Jacob are mentioned here differs from the order given in Genesis 35 : 23–26. In Genesis, Rachel is second in the last. In the *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, her name appears last, because she was the last among the wives of Jacob to give birth to any children—S.A.L.

According to the *Torah*, Joseph was of twelve years when he had this dream (Genesis 37:2).

The eleven stars mentioned in the account of the dream were the remaining eleven sons of Jacob. The sun and moon referred to Jacob and Leah, the stepmother of Joseph. It is stated in the *Torah* that Joseph had related his dream to his brothers before his father's warning was given to him (Genesis 37:11).

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] Alif Lām Rā.

These are the verses of a Book
clear in itself.

[2] We have sent it down,
the Qur'ān, in the Arabic language,
in order that ye might understand it (easily).

[3] We are narrating to thee
(O Prophet) by means of a revelation in
this Qur'ān, the fairest of stories of
which thou wert not fully aware hitherto.

[4] When Joseph related to his father
a dream that he had dreamt:
"O my father! I have beheld eleven stars
and even the sun and the moon—beheld
them all making obeisance to me."

[5] He said: "O my son!
Speak not of thy vision to thy brothers,
lest they hatch a plot against thee,
specially when Satan is an open enemy of man.

[6] "(Here is a tiding that) thy Lord
will exalt thee (even as thou didst
find thyself in thy dream) and

He will show thee manner of reading into
the meaning of things, and fill
the measure of His Favour on thee and
on the house of Jacob, even as
He had aforetime fulfilled the measure of
His Favour on thy forefathers, Abraham and Isaac.
Without doubt thy Lord is Omniscient and Wise."

SECTION 2: VERSES 7–20

[7] Assuredly in (the story of)
Joseph and his brothers those who pester
thee with questions (in respect of it)
will find ample material (for reflection).

[8] Said they, (the stepbrothers of Joseph):
"Decidedly Joseph and his brother are
better loved of our father than we,
although we outnumber them;
indeed our father is clearly in the wrong."

The brothers of Joseph planned to take Joseph with them into the woods, where they used to graze their cattle and thus get an opportunity to throw him into a well. This idea originated with Reuben who was against the idea of killing him (Genesis 37:24).

[9] "Let us kill Joseph or push him
out into some other land,
so that our father shall set his face on us
alone and we thereafter live as upright men."

[10] One of them said: "Kill him not
but if you really wish to get rid of him,
better throw him down into the
bottom of a blind well. Perchance
some wayfarers may pick him up
(and carry him away with them).

[11] They (all went to their father and) said: "O our father! why dost thou not trust us and (let Joseph move in our company); indeed (we assure thee) we mean him well."

[12] Send him then with us tomorrow that he may sport with us and enjoy himself and surely we will take care of him."

The sons of Jacob engaged themselves during day time in grazing their cattle and return in the evening to their tents for rest. When Jacob came to know that Joseph was being taken by his brothers into the woods, Jacob instantaneously felt alarmed at the idea. He knew that the woods were infested with wolves, and he feared that Joseph might fall a prey to them. It was with no small reluctance, therefore, that Jacob let Joseph accompany his brothers. But his brothers were delighted at the thought that they could now play upon the fear expressed by Jacob. Having carried out their nefarious plan by throwing Joseph into a well, they reported to their father that some wolves had taken away Joseph.

[13] He said: "Verily it will grieve me, should you take him away from me, for, I fear some wolf might devour him while you happen to be heedless of him."

[14] They said: "When we are so many in number, how it is possible for any wolf to devour him? Surely, if such a thing should happen, we would then have proved ourselves to be a worthless lot."

[15] And when they went away with him and resolved to put him at the bottom of a well, (and indeed carried out their resolve),

> We revealed to him: "(Joseph): do not despair; a time will come when they will call to mind this deed of theirs in a situation when they could hardly recognise (thee as their forsaken brother),"
>
> [16] And at nightfall they came weeping to their father.
>
> [17] They said: "O our father! we went to run races leaving Joseph behind to look after our belongings and a wolf devoured him; but thou wilt not believe us even though we speak the very truth."

Jacob was naturally grieved at this report, but he bore the grief with becoming patience. He could not forget the glad tidings that had been given him in the past from above, that his son Joseph was to play a glorious part in life, and that all prophecies of old, would be fulfilled in his person. So he could not believe in the report given by his sons. He suspected that some mischief had been done to his son by his brothers and, therefore, he laid his trust in God, that one day everything would be cleared and the boy would return to him.

In verse 18, it is stated that the brothers of Joseph had presented to their father the shirt, that Joseph had put on that day, with some blood sprinkled thereon, in proof of the story that they had coined. But Jacob could easily see that his sons could not possess Joseph's shirt, if he had been carried away by wolves. Besides, the shirt could not have remained intact if that had happened. He was certain, therefore, that the story was got up. So he listened to the story in silence. His only reply to them was, "Nay! This is what your hearts have impelled you to fabricate." The reply afforded a clear indication that Jacob did not believe in the story.

It may be pointed out here that when the brothers of Joseph having thrown him into well had sat down to eat bread, they noticed a company of Ishmaelites coming with camels bearing spicery, balm and myrrh on their way to Egypt. At this time, Judah said to his brothers: "What profit is it if we slay our brother? Why not we sell him to the Ishmaelites? So they sold him for twenty pieces of silver.*

This was how Joseph was brought to Egypt, where he was purchased by an Egyptian nobleman holding a high rank in the Egyptian army, Potiphar by name. (Genesis 37:36)

The Qur'ān styles him as 'Azīz or one holding a high position in the state. This nobleman had purchased Joseph for his goodly appearance. But once he began to find in the boy qualities of mind and heart worthy of respect, he invested him with the necessary authority to exercise full control over his household affairs and the management of his personal estate. The *Torah* (39:4) states that Joseph managed these affairs so well, that the income of the estate in his charge was doubled.

Potiphar, as stated in verse 21, advised his wife: "Treat him (Joseph) hospitably: haply he may be useful to us; or we may even adopt him as a son." The expression, brief as it is, emphasises the high regard in which Joseph was held by his master.

This was the beginning of Joseph's renowned career in Egypt to which the Qur'ān refers in the following manner:

> "Thus did We settle Joseph in the land and We showed him the manner of reading into the meanings of things (even dreams) and God hath every power to carry out His Purpose, but most men know it not."

According to the Genesis 37:28, Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites not by Joseph's brothers but by the Madianite merchantmen, who had lifted Joseph out of the well in which he had been thrown by his brothers.—S.A.L.

The expression 'meaning of things' has a reference to the stars that Joseph had seen in his dream already referred to, and this will be explained in the last note under this chapter. The expression 'God hath every power' is an answer to the machinations of Joseph's brothers who had plotted against him. But their very plot led to the glory of Joseph and the frustration of his brothers.

Joseph was but seventeen when he was snatched away from his father Jacob. But when during his stay with Potiphar, as stated in verse 22, he attained maturity of mind. God 'bestowed on him knowledge and judgement.' This is how virtue is rewarded in the end.

[18] And they brought (with them in
proof of their story) a shirt of his
stained with false blood. He said:
"Nay! This is what your hearts
have impelled you to fabricate (to your
satisfaction). But I shall have to bear
what has been described to me."

[19] And there came a caravan
who sent one of them to fetch water
(from this well), and he let down
his bucket. (As he drew up the water and
noticed what came out therein)
exclaimed he: "What a joy! This is a youth."
And in order to make use of him
as merchandise, they hid him away
(from the sight of others, lest any of them
might come forward to claim him).
But God knew what they did.

[20] And they sold him (in the
Egyptian market) for a paltry price of just
a few *dirhams* (coins), since they were not
keen on getting any higher price for him.

SECTION 3: VERSES 21-29

[21] And he who bought him—an
Egyptian—said to his wife:
"Treat him honourably; he may bring
profit to us or we may adopt him as a son."
Thus did We settle Joseph in
the land and We showed him
the manner of reading into the meanings
of things (even dreams) and God
hath every power to carry out His Purpose,
but most men know it not.

[22] And when he had reached
the stage of manhood, We bestowed on him
knowledge and judgement;
for in this wise do We recompense
those who do good (to others).

From verse 23 begins the account of the most momentous event of Joseph's life.

Joseph is stated in the *Torah* to have possessed a very attractive personality. So when he reached his manhood, Potiphar's wife conceived a passion for him and resorted to various devices to entice him. But the purity of Joseph's character could not be sullied.

[23] And she in whose house
he lived conceived in her mind various
plans to entice him. And so
(one day) she shut the doors and said:
"Come!" He said: "God keep me!
He (thy husband) is my patron, and
has kept me comfortably.
Verily those who return evil
for good never prosper."

[24] And of a surety she longed
for him (so ardently that) he too

would have longed for her
(equally ardently) had he not perceived
an open indication from his Lord.
This We did just to avert evil and
lewdness from him since he was
one of Our sincere servants.

[25] And they both made for the door,
the one rushing after other, (Joseph
with the intent of rushing out, and
the woman rushing to thwart his passage, and
in this struggle) she rent his shirt,
the hind part of it; and at the door
they encountered her husband.
"What" said she, "shall be the recompense
of one who hath intended evil to thy
wife but a prison or a sore punishment?

[26] He said: "It is she who
hath conceived plans in her mind to
entice me." And it so happened that a
member of her own family observed,
"If his shirt be rent in front she speaketh
the truth and he is a liar,

[27] "And if on the other hand
his shirt be rent in the hind part of it,
she lieth and he speaketh the truth."

[28] And when he saw his
shirt torn in the hind part of it,
he said (turning to his wife): "This is one
of the guiles of you women, and
great indeed are your guiles."

[29] "O Joseph! Leave this affair and
thou (O woman) ask pardon for thy crime,
for thou indeed art one of those
who have (knowingly) sinned."

SECTION 4: VERSES 30–35

[30] And (when the news of this
incident spread in the city)
several women therein said: "The wife
of 'Aziz, hath tried to seduce her
servant and indeed she has fallen in love
with him. Verily, we see that
she is in manifest error."

[31] And when she heard of this slander,
she sent for the women concerned and
got ready for them a banquet, and
there she gave to each one of them a knife and
(at a particular stage) called (to Joseph),
"Come out before them."
When they saw him, they were so
greatly bewitched by his sight that they cut
their hands and exclaimed: "God keep us!
This is no mortal man: this is
none other than a gracious angel."

When every attempt to get round Joseph failed, Potiphar's wife held out a threat to Joseph, that she would see him disgraced in the public eye by being thrown into prison. Joseph's reply was that he preferred suffering in jail to turning away from the path of virtue.

The *Torah* mentions that when Joseph was sent to the prison house, the jail superintendent grew kind toward him and entrusted him with the management of the jail. Thus in jail too, did God bring him honour (Genesis 39: 22). Indeed, even the prisoners held him in high esteem (as in verse 36).

[32] She said: "This is he on
whose account ye taunted me.
I did wish him to yield to my desires,
but he stood firm. Now, (let him understand

that) if he obey not my comman',
he shall surely be cast into
prison and degraded."

[33] (Having heard this) Joseph prayed:
"O Lord! Imprisonment is more
welcome to me than that to which
they call me, and unless Thou turn away
their snares from me, I may likely incline
towards them and become one of the witless."

[34] And his Lord heard him and
turned aside their snares from him;
verily, He is the One Who Heareth, Knoweth.

[35] Even after they had witnessed
the proofs (of his innocence),
they thought it desirable
to imprison him for a time.

SECTION 5: VERSES 36-42

It is stated in the *Torah* that while Joseph was in prison, a co-prisoner who was a dismissed head cup-bearer of Pharaoh, narrated to Joseph a dream that he had dreamt, and that Joseph interpreted it for him saying, that he would be restored to his office within the next three days. He, however, told him that in case he was restored to the favour of Pharaoh, it would be upto him to speak of him to his king, and give him an account of how he had been brought to Egypt, from the land of the Hebrews and how he had been put into prison. There was another prisoner there, an equally dismissed servant of Pharaoh, who also had dreamt a dream. To him Joseph said that he would be put to death within the next three days, and that his body would be hung by the branch of a tree, and so it happened. Three days later the head cup-bearer was released from prison, and he was restored to his former position, but the man forgot to put in a word to Pharaoh on behalf of Joseph. Thus, years passed by, before the chance came to him to come out of the prison.

The chance referred to in verse 43 came this way. Pnaraoh dreamt a strange dream, whereupon he invited his courtiers and the state magicians to give him a satisfactory interpretation of it; but none of them was able to offer it. It was, then that the head cup-bearer, the former prison-mate of Joseph, recollected the promise that he had given him to speak of him to Pharaoh; so much so, he not only spoke to Pharaoh about Joseph and the interpretation that he had given of his own dream in the prison, but obtained permission to visit Joseph in the prison, and seek an interpretation of the king's dream also. Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, when conveyed to Pharaoh seemed so convincing to him, that he felt eager to meet Joseph. He was, therefore, ordered to be released from prison.

[36] (And it so happened that)
there came into the prison with him two youths.
Said one of them (to Joseph): "Methought
(in a dream) I was pressing (grapes to make)
wine," and the other said:
"I dreamed that I was carrying on
my head bread of which the birds were
pecking." (The two asked of him),
"Tell us what this means, for
we see thou art a good man."

[37] He said: "(Do not feel worried
over it). Even before the food that you
have to eat is brought to you,
I shall give you my interpretation of your
dreams. This I shall do out of
the knowledge my Lord hath given me.
For I have abandoned the religion of those,
who believe not in God and
who deny the life to come.

[38] "(And for my part) I have followed
the faith of my forebears, Abraham,
Isaac and Jacob; we (children of Abraham)

cannot associate aught with God.
This is a bounty of God to us (the progeny
of Abraham) and to mankind at large,
but most people do not offer thanks for this.

[39] "O my fellow-prisoners!
(Have you ever paid a thought to this)
which is better—to believe in
a variety of lords or in God
the One, the All-Powerful.

[40] "What ye worship beside Him
are mere names which you have coined,
you and your fathers, for which
God hath sent down no sanction,
the right to exercise sovereign authority
belongeth only to God. His Command is
that ye worship none but Him.
This is the right faith;
but most people are not aware of it.

[41] "O my fellow-prisoners!
(Now listen to the interpretation of your dreams).
As to one of you, (who had dreamt
that he was pressing grapes to make
wine will be released from prison)
he will (as even before getting into prison)
serve his lord with wine; but as to the other,
he will be crucified and the birds
shall eat from off his head.
The matter is decreed concerning
which ye had enquired."

[42] And he said to one of the two
whom he had thought would be released:
"Remember me to thy lord."
But Satan caused him to forget (the request of
Joseph) to make mention of it to his lord.

So he (Joseph) had to remain
some more years in prison.

SECTION 6: VERSES 43-49

[43] And the king said: "Verily,
I saw (in a dream) seven fat kine which seven lean
ones devoured; and seven green ears of
corn and a like number withered.
O nobles! Read for me the
meaning of my dream, if you are
capable of reading dreams."

[44] They said: "They are intricate
dreams and we are not
able to read such dreams."

[45] And he of the two who had
been set free (from prison) now remembered
after a long time (the request of
Joseph made while he was in prison), said:
"I will let you know its interpretation.
So let me go (to one who
I know can interpret it)."

[46] (Coming to Joseph in the prison,
he said:) "Joseph! O man of truth!
Interpret to me a vision (in which it was
seen) that seven lean kine devour
seven fat ones, and seven green ears of corn
and a like number withered.
So that when I return to the people
(who are anxious to know the meaning of
the dream) they may know it."

[47] He said: "You shall sow
seven years as usual and store up
the corn, which you reap in its ears except

a portion of it (which you
may have for) your consumption.

[48] "Then after that shall come
a period of seven years of scarcity
when you shall consume what you have stored up,
keeping a portion of it in reserve.

[49] "Then after that, shall come
a year during which people will have
plenty of rain in which they shall
(have fruit in abundance and
shall therefrom) draw juice in plenty."

SECTION : 7 VERSES 50-58

[50] And when it was disclosed to
the king that such was the reading of his
vision obtained from Joseph,
who was in prison at the time,
the king said: "Bring him to me."
But when the messenger came to him (Joseph),
he said: "Go back to thy lord and
ask him what meant the women
who had cut their hands;
for full well knoweth my Lord
the snare they had laid."

Pharaoh sent a special messenger to the prison to announce to Joseph the order of his release and bring him to his court. But Joseph declined to be released, till the accusation levelled at him and which had brought him into the prison, was thoroughly enquired into by the king and a decision reached. Should he be found guilty, the question of his release should not arise. On the other hand, should he be found innocent, he should be set free immediately without any hesitation. This being the attitude of Joseph, it became necessary for Pharaoh to institute an enquiry into this affair: and it resounds nobly to the credit of Joseph, that all those who had hitherto joined to accuse

Joseph before Potiphar including his very wife, now felt that they should themselves confess guilt, for having given formerly a false evidence against him. The wife of Potiphar was the foremost among them, to admit her own guilt and exonerate Joseph of all suspicions, and testified openly to the absolute purity of his character. She had by now exercised incessantly; such acute contrition for the wrong done by her to Joseph, that her own character in consequence had attained a state of purity, that she could not feel happy until the purity of Joseph's character was established, through her own frank confession and her own categorical endorsement of his character.

[51] (Then the king having called
the women concerned to his presence)
said to them: "What meant you
when you importuned Joseph?" They said:
"God forbid! We can say nothing
against his character." The wife of
Potiphar said: "Now hath the truth come to
light. It was I who tried to entice him:
surely he is of the upright.

[52] "By this confession may he
(Joseph, know now, that I did not play him
false in his absence, and that God
guideth not the unfaithful in their machinations."

PART XIII

Chapter XII

JOSEPH—YUSUF

(Contd.)

CHAPTER XII

JOSEPH—YUSUF

SECTION 7 *(Contd.)*

[53] "Yet I do not hold myself clear,
for the human heart is prone to
evil, except of those on whom my Lord
hath mercy; for my Lord
is Forgiving, Merciful."

[54] And the king said:
"Bring him to me: I shall attach him to
my own person." When he had spoken to him,
he said: "From this day on,
thou shalt be with us, occupying
a place of honour and trust."

[55] He said: "You may keep me
in charge of the assets of store; for,
I know, I shall be a prudent keeper."

[56] Thus did We give Joseph a place
of authority in the land that he might
exercise it as he deemed fit.
We bestow Our Favours on whom
We will, and We suffer not the work of
those who do good to others go unrequited.

[57] And truly the recompense of
the life to come for those, who have
believed (in God) and lived
righteously, is much higher.

[58] And the brothers of Joseph came, and
appeared before him, and he forthwith
recognised them, while they could not (recognise him).

SECTION 8 : VERSES 59–68

[59] And when he had provided
them with their provisions, he said:
(when you come here next),
"Bring me the brother of yours
who is with your father. See you not that
I give you (provisions) to the extent of
your full requirements, and
I am a very considerate host ?"

When the decision in his favour was announced and he felt fully exonerated, Joseph prepared himself to meet the king. So highly impressed was Pharaoh already from all the accounts that he heard, of the uprightness of Joseph's character, that when Joseph arrived in the court, he was invested with due authority to control the affairs of his kingdom.

The Book of Genesis narrates (41:37–45) how Pharaoh felt about him:

> And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, "For as much as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art; thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou." And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, "See I have set thee over all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; and he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, "Bow thy knee"; and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your con-

> sent no man shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah.

Two phases of Joseph's life call for attention: one was what related to the period of his stay with Potiphar, during which he rose from the position of a slave to that of a trusted administrator of his state, the other was what was marked by his release from his prison and his instant rise to the position of the ruler of Egypt under the aegis of Pharaoh.

In respect of the first phase, the expression in verse 21 of this chapter:

> Thus did We settle Joseph in the land and We showed him the manner of reading into the meanings of things (even dreams) and God hath every power to carry out His Purpose.

draws attention to the divine purpose at work in the life of Joseph in the land of Egypt. Even in respect of the *second* phase also, a like attention is drawn to the same purpose. Verse 56 which refers to this runs:

> Thus did We give Joseph a place of authority in the land that he might exercise it as he deemed fit. We bestow Our Favours on whom We will, and We suffer not the work of those who do good to others go unrequited.

The one was the stage of preparation for a high office. The other was that of its fulfilment, "We suffer not the work of those who do good" states the Qur'ān.

Joseph was thirty years of age when he entered the court of Pharaoh. (Genesis 41:46).

The Qur'ān does not give account of what happened to him thereafter in any detail. It was however in conformity with what Joseph had dreamt. The first seven years were years

of bumper crops, during which Joseph managed to store up huge stocks, sufficient to meet the food requirements of the people of Egypt, for the next period of seven lean years, during which, according to the Book of Genesis 41 : 56, "famine was over all the face of the earth;" so much so, that people living in the adjoining countries had to come to Joseph for the supply of food grains to their people. It was with such a purpose that the brothers of Joseph came to Egypt from Can'ān.

Verse 58 of this chapter gives the picture of a very significant phase of Joseph's life. When Joseph's brothers came to him to seek aid, Joseph recognised them at once. But his brothers could not recognise him. He was but seventeen when he had parted from them, and now he had reached his fortieth year. Moreover, the brothers could never imagine, that a brother of theirs, who was sold away as a slave for a paltry sum to the caravan proceeding to Egypt, would at any time be at the helm of affairs in that land. Joseph tried to gather as much information as he could, about their father and other members of his family including his own brother Benjamin, who had not accompanied them to Egypt at the time. Joseph told his brothers that further aid would be given to them, when they would come for a second time, if they could only bring with them their brother Benjamin, whom they had left behind. So, on their return they had to make serious efforts to persuade Jacob, to let Benjamin accompany them during their second visit to Egypt. When the sons of Jacob came to Joseph with Benjamin in their company, Joseph at once recognised him. He managed to inform Benjamin secretly that he was Joseph, his own brother, and he assured him that a life of happiness was in store for him.

[60] " But if you bring him not to
me, then you will not have from me
any corn whatsoever, nor shall you
be allowed to approach me."

[61] They said : "We will prevail upon
his father and this we will certainly do."

[62] Said he (Joseph) to his servants:
"Put back their money (with which
they had purchased provisions) into their
camel-packs that they may perceive
it when they had returned to their family;
belike, they will come back."

[63] When they returned to their
father, they said: "O our father!
Grain will be withholden from us
(in future) unless you send our
brother (Benjamin) with us and then
we shall have (grain) to the extent of our
requirements; and we will surely
take care of him."

[64] He (Jacob) said: "Shall I
entrust him to you, hoping for any
result other than what it was, when
I had entrusted his brother to you
before? (Yet I will grant your request);
for, God is good enough for a guardian:
and of those who show compassion,
He is the most Compassionate."

[65] When they opened their goods,
they found (to their surprise) that
their money (with which they had
purchased grain from Joseph) had
been returned to them. They
exclaimed: "O our father! What more
can we desire? Here is our money
returned to us; we will obtain grain
for our family, and take care of our
brother, and will have a camel-load
of extra grain. What we have now
brought is a small quantity."

[66] He (Jacob) said: "I will not send
him with you unless you give me
an assurance in the name of God, that
you will bring him back to me, except
when you are confronted from every side
with obstacles." And when
they had given him their assurance, he said:
"God is witness to what we have said."

[67] And, he (Jacob) said:
"O my sons! Enter not you (all) by one and
the same gate, but enter severally by
different gates, yet can I not help
you against anything decreed by God.
The power to decree a thing belongeth
only to God. In Him do I put my trust and
in Him let the trustful lay their trust."

[68] And when they entered even as
their father had directed them,
they could not avert from them anything
decreed of God; it only met a
desire of Jacob which he had charged
them to fulfil; for he (Jacob) was possessed
of knowledge which We had imparted to him,
a knowledge which most men did not possess.

SECTION 9: VERSES 69–79

Joseph's one great wish was to keep his brother Benjamin with him in Egypt. But it was by no means an easy task to detach him from his brothers, when they were to return to Can'ān. Verses 71 to 86 narrate how this was made possible. The expression in verse 76, "This stratagem did We plan for Joseph," makes it clear that this was divinely arranged. The result was that Joseph's brothers had to return to Jacob without Benjamin.

[69] And when they appeared before
Joseph, he drew his brother (Benjamin)
to his side. He said (quietly to him),
"I am indeed thine own brother.
Do not worry over what they had done."

[70] Then when he had supplied
them with the provisions they required,
he placed his own (measuring) cup
in the brother's sack. Then a crier (of the state)
cried after them: "O you of the caravan!
You are surely thieves."

[71] They turned back and said:
"What is it that you have missed."

[72] "We have missed," said they,
"the prince's cup. For him
who shall restore it (will be given)
a camel-load of grain!" (A leader of
theirs said): "I pledge myself for it."

[73] They said: "By God! you know for
certain that we did not come to do
any wrong in the land and
we are not thieves."

[74] "What," said they (the Egyptians),
"shall be the penalty of it,
if you are found liars?"

[75] They said: "He in whose
sack it shall be found, will be given
up to you in satisfaction thereof.
We do not let the unjust go unpunished."

[76] Then he (Joseph) began the search of the
sacks of others before he came to the
sack of his brother; and then from the sack

of his brother he drew it out. This stratagem did We plan for Joseph. He had no power to seize his brother under the law of the king, except as God willed it. We lift up into grades (of knowledge) whom We will, and above all those endowed with knowledge, there is One, the All-knowing.

[77] They said: "If it is he who has stolen, then it is his own brother who has stolen before." But Joseph kept it secret to himself and did not disclose it to them. He said: "You are in plight, but God knoweth well (the truth of) what you say."

[78] They said: "O Prince! He hath a very aged father; take therefore one of us in his stead. For, we see in thee a generous person."

[79] He (Joseph) said: "God forbid that we should take into custody, one other than him with whom we found our property; else we should be acting unjustly."

SECTION 10: VERSES 80–93

[80] So, when they despaired of taking him (Benjamin) away, they went apart for counsel. The eldest of them said: "Know ye not that your father had taken an assurance from you before God, and how formerly you had failed to fulfil a similar

promise made in respect of Joseph?
By no means will I leave the land till
my father gives me permission or
God decides for me; and He is the best of
those who take decisions.

[81] "Return you then to your father
and say: 'O our father! Verily
thy son has committed theft; we bear
witness only of what we discovered, and
we could not guard against the unforeseen.

[82] "'Enquire for thyself in the city
where we have been and also of
the caravan with which we arrived,
and we verily speak the truth.'"

Jacob was grieved immensely over what had happened. The thought of Benjamin revived in his mind the memory of a former loss, namely of Joseph. In this state, he cried out to his sons that they should return to Egypt and search for his lost sons. So they returned to Egypt and met Joseph. The meeting was momentous. It resulted in the disclosure of the fact that the ruler of Egypt, before whom they appeared was none other than their own brother Joseph, whom they had greatly wronged in the past. But Joseph was magnanimous enough to forgive them. The news of the brothers of Joseph having come to Egypt reached the ears of Pharaoh and he invited them to be his guests. He not only honoured them but asked them to return home, and bring with them to Egypt their revered father and his entire family.

[83] He (Jacob) said: "Nay,
you have coined the story yourselves.
But (for me) patience is seemly.
May be, God will bring them (Benjamin and
Joseph) back to me together.
Verily, He is the Knowing, the Wise."

[84] And he turned away from them
and said "Alas! for Joseph!" and
his eyes turned bleak with grief, and
he was full of silent sorrow.

[85] They said: "By God thou wilt
never cease to yearn for Joseph till thou
art at the point of death or dead."

[86] He said: "I am only bewailing to God
my great distress and sorrow, and
I know from God what you do not know.

[87] "O my sons! Go and
seek Joseph and his brother and despair
not of God's Mercy, for, none but
the unbelieving despair of the Mercy of God."

[88] And when they appeared before
him (Joseph) they said: "O prince!
distress hath overtaken us and
our family, and small is the amount of
money that we have brought; wherefore
(out of pity for us) measure out (grain)
in sufficient quantity, and be bountiful to us,
and God verily rewardeth the bountiful."

[89] He (Joseph) said: "Do you
remember aright what you did to
Joseph and his brother in your ignorance?"

[90] They said: "Canst thou indeed
be Joseph?" He said: "I am Joseph,
and this is my brother (pointing to
Benjamin). God hath indeed been
gracious to those who fear Him and
endure (the trials of life)—Aye!
God doth not suffer the righteous
to go unrewarded."

[91] They said: "By God! Surely God hath exalted thee above us, and we were certainly in the wrong."

[92] He said: "Let no blame rest on you this day. God will forgive you and He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy.

[93] "Go ye with this my shirt and lay it on the face of my father, and he will recover his sight. And bring me all your family."

SECTION 11 : VERSES 94-104

Verses 94 to 101 deal with the arrival of Jacob in Egypt along with his family, and his meeting with his beloved son Joseph and the great reception given to him by Pharaoh.

Chapters 45-47 of the *Book of Genesis* give a detailed account of this event. The fact that needs special notice in this account is the reception given by Joseph to his father, his brothers and other members of his family. A gathering of the Egyptian society was held. Jacob had already arrived at the place of meeting before the entry of Joseph. When he arrived, the entire gathering rose to their feet and prostrated before him. That was the customary salutation given to a ruler in Egypt, a form of respect observed in several leading courts of the time. Seeing that every one had prostrated before Joseph, Jacob too prostrated before Joseph. With the advent of Islam, this form of respect was prohibited in as much as, it resembled the form of worship offered to deities. Islam enjoins what is called *sajda* only to God and none else.

Here ends the accounts of Joseph, which had begun with the vision which he had beheld in his dream at Can'ān. The vision is fulfilled in the land of Egypt.

Whatever Joseph said on this occasion and the prayer that he prayed, are aspects of the account of his life, which will be reviewed at the close of this chapter.

[94] And when the caravan had
departed (from Egypt), their father
(who was then at home in Can'ān) exclaimed
(before those around him at home):
"I surely catch the smell of Joseph, if you
say not that I am in my dotage."

[95] They (those around him) said:
"By God thou art still suffering
under thy old delusion."

[96] And when the bearer of good
tidings arrived, he lay it (the shirt)
on his (Jacob's) face, and instantly
his eyesight returned to him. He said:
"Did I not tell you that I knew from
God what you knew not."

[97] They said: "O our father!
Ask for us forgiveness for our sins; for
indeed we have been sinners."

[98] He said: "I shall presently ask
of my Lord forgiveness for you.
Verily, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.'

[99] And then when they appeared
before Joseph, he lodged his parents with him
and said: "Dwell ye in Egypt
in security, if God will."

[100] And he raised his parents to
the seat of state when (as was
the etiquette of the court) they had
bowed down to him. Then said he (Joseph):

"O my father! this is what was meant by
my dream of old. My Lord hath
made it come true and hath indeed been
gracious to me, since He hath taken me
out from prison and brought you
(here out of the desert),
after Satan had stirred up strife between me
and my brothers. Verily, my Lord
arrangeth in a graceful manner what He liketh.
Verily, He is the Knowing, the Wise.

[101] "O my Lord! thou hast given me
dominion and hath given me insight to
interpret visions. O Thou Maker of
the heavens and of the earth!
My guardian art Thou in this world and
the next! Cause Thou me to die a Muslim
and grant me the company of those
who have lived in purity."

[102] (O Prophet) This is one of
the unknown stories (of the past)
which We make known to thee.
Thou wast not present with
them (the brothers of Joseph)
when they concerted their
designs and laid their plot.

[103] But most men will not believe
(this story) although you ardently
desire (them know) it,

[104] And although thou dost not
ask them any return for (narrating)
it. It is naught but an admonition
for all mankind.

SECTION 12: VERSES 105–111

[105] Many are the signs in the heavens and in the earth, (so full of meaning for men), yet they pass them by, hardly taking notice of them:

[106] And most of them believe not in God except by joining others (with Him).

[107] Do they feel certain that a chastisement from God will not encompass them or that the Hour of Judgement will not come upon them suddenly, while they least expect it?

[108] Say (O Prophet!): "This is my way: I call (men) to God resting my stand on firm conviction—I and those who follow me. And glory be to God! I am not of those who set up peers for God."

[109] Never before thee did We send any other than men, chosen out of the people of the cities, to whom We delivered revelations. Have they not travelled in the land and seen what was the end of the people who had gone before them? Aye! for those who have abstained from evil, there is a good abode in the Hereafter. Can they not understand this much,

[110] Till the apostles have lost all hopes and been dubbed liars and Our help reached them and saved whom We would (from among their people)? But Our chastisement however was not withheld from the wicked.

[111] Assuredly in their annals there
is a meaning for men of understanding.
This is no tale of fiction but a confirmation
of that which was already with them
(the previous scriptures), and an explanation
of all things, and a guidance, and mercy
to those who have faith in God.

The Annals of Joseph—Significance

In a general review of the incidents which befell Joseph during his lifetime, the following facts call for special attention.

The Egyptian Civilization at its Zenith

About 2000 B.C. Egypt was the centre of a flourishing civilization. The countries adjoining it were not at that period of history so advanced in culture. Their peoples still lived nomadic lives. One of these adjoining areas was that of Palestine, which was linked to Egypt through the Isthmus of Senai. It was merely a pasture land inhabited by a few pastoral tribes. One of these tribes was that of Abraham.

Abraham and his Progeny—A Line of Prophets

The advent of Abraham occurred in the doab of Euphrates and Tigris, an area renowned for its own type of civilization. From there he migrated to Can'ān. The *Book of Genesis* (13 : 14–17). states :

> And the Lord said unto Abraham, after that Lot was separated from him, "Lift up now thine eyes and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth : so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered."

The Qur'ān has referred to these glad tidings in several places.

When Abraham settled down in the land of Can'ān, he received further glad tidings, which all went to emphasise that God had chosen him to be the progenitor of a long line of divine messengers and of kings, and that He had chosen this line for His special favours. Abraham was also told that so long as his progeny abstained from injustice and tyranny, they would receive uninterruptedly the favours and blessings held out to them. This promise of God was always regarded by the descendants of Abraham as the Covenant of God entered into with them. Under this Covenant, his progeny was required to remain always steadfast in their devotion to the *din* or the way of God, and to continue to invite others to follow it, and in return, God would bestow on them His favours and grant them success in life. References to this Covenant have already been made in the previous chapters; for instance, in 'Al-Baqra' verse 124, and 'Hūd' verse 71.

The *Book of Genesis* (15: 13-15) refers to an important dream that Abraham had dreamt, in which God appraised Abraham of what was to befall his progeny in the course of their history:

> And He (God) said unto Abraham, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance."

Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael in due course migrated to Hijaz and settled down there, while Isaac stayed away in Can'ān. Jacob was the son born to Isaac. Jacob having come of age, went to Harān and was married to a cousin of his, the daughter of his own mother's sister. It was twenty years after this event that he returned to Can'ān.

The *Torah* mentions that the Covenant of God given to Abraham was renewed to Jacob; and thus is endorsed by the Qur'ān.

The tribe of Abraham, even as other tribes in Palestine, as already pointed out, lived a pastoral life engaged in grazing their cattle in its pastures.

Pride of Civilization

As stated already, a prosperous civilization flourished during this period in the land of Egypt which lay in close proximity to Palestine. Its principal city, Ramses, had achieved fame in the fields of arts and sciences and had thereby attained a state of high civilization; so much so, the Egyptians as a class had developed an inordinate sense of superiority over their neighbours, the people of the countries adjoining Egypt. The Can'ānites and the Hebrews were among those particularly despised by them. They called them a race of shepherds, and disdained to have any formal social relations with them. In fact, an Egyptian would consider it derogatory to him even "to eat bread with the Hebrews; for that was an abomination to Egyptians," (*Genesis* 43 : 33). Even the rustics among the Egyptians living in villages would not tolerate the Hebrews settling down among them.

A Demonstration of Divine Power

Pride such as this hath its inevitable fall. So nemesis overtook the Egyptians. A member of the despised race of the Can'ānites, who had been brought to the land of the Egyptians as but a slave, Joseph by name, was raised to the position of a ruler over them by dint of sheer merit and as a result of an exemplary good life. That is the way of God—the *Sunnat Allah*—which never alters. States the Qur'ān:

"Thus did We give Joseph a place of authority in the land that he might exercise it as he deemed fit. We bestow Our Favours on whom We will, and We suffer not the work of those who do good to others go unrequited." (Q. 12 : 56)

For full four hundred years did the progeny of Jacob, the descendants of his twelve sons, live in the land honoured and respected by a people, who had once despised them. So well did they prosper in Egypt and multiply, that when they eventually returned to Palestine they were several lakhs in number.

Conflict between Spiritual Truth and Materialism

The first thing that invites attention here is the conflict between spiritual truths of life and material outlook on life. The family of Jacob was the repository of divine knowledge. But it lacked material wealth. Indeed, it did not enjoy even the elementary amenities of city life. Its members lived mostly on pasture lands, occupied with the grazing of their cattle thereon and were content with what nature directly provided them for sustenance. But conditions in Egypt were different from what they had lived in. Her people had not been blessed with the knowledge of the revealed truth; but they enjoyed a very advanced form of material prosperity, as disclosed by modern archæological and other researches. Those who lived in their metropolitan centre were highly educated. The leaders among them were well-versed in statecraft. Their priests were equally noted for their knowledge of occult sciences.

The king was styled Pharaoh. Probably it was Aboni who was king in Egypt during the days with which this chapter is concerned. Under his regime, Egypt had reached a high state of material prosperity. But it has always been noticed in the annals of man, that material prosperity which runs counter to the spiritual values of life, as it did in Egypt at the time cannot last long. It is only when it tacitly yields to the high purposes of life that it acquires the talent to survive. So, it was clear that if its prosperity was to be maintained any further, it had to change its ways and accept the guidance of one, who could eradicate the moral disease that was eating into its soul and give to it a new life. It was how Egypt was obliged to welcome Joseph as its saviour. Verse 56 already quoted, refers to his role in this regard.

Action and Reaction in Life

The rise of Joseph was by no means an abnormal occurrence. It only marked the course, which the law of life takes in the field of human activity. That law is: "As ye sow, so will ye reap." What happened to the brothers of Joseph on the one hand and to Joseph on the other, was nothing but a demonstration of this law.

> That was the way of God—*Sunnat Allah*—in dealing with those gone by and in the course it takes, thou wilt never find a change. (Q. 33 : 62)

They who conform to this law of life always prosper. That is the truth which the Qur'ān repeatedly asserts in its pages. Indeed, such an emphasis is markedly noticeable even in this chapter :-

> Assuredly in (the story of) Joseph and his brothers those who pester thee with questions (in respect of it) will find ample material (for reflection). (Q. 12 : 7).

> And when he had reached the stage of manhood, We bestowed on him knowledge and judgement; for in this wise do We recompense those who do good (to others). (Q. 12 : 22)

> Verily those who return evil for good never prosper. (Q. 12 : 23)

> God doth not suffer the righteous to go unrewarded. (Q. 12: 90)

> Assuredly in their annals there is a meaning for [illegible] n of understanding. This is not a tale of fictica [illegible] confirmation of that which was already with them (he previous scriptures), and an explanation of all thi[illegible] s, and a guidance, and mercy to those who have faith in God. (Q. 12 : 111)

Personalities Referred to in the Chapter

Jacob (Peace on him)

The picture of Jacob which the chapter raises before us is that of a man, afflicted with deep sorrow—so deep and overpowering, that any one in his position would have collapsed both mentally and morally. But he does not. On the other hand, he endures his affliction with a fortitude worthy of a messenger of God, of one who was to explain to others the meaning of things, and the purpose of God at work in human life. Despite his intense distress, he never faltered in his resolve to submit himself entirely to the Will of God, trusting always that all will end well. And so it was as the Qur'ān points out. God never forsakes one who lays implicit trust in Him. Jacob's endurance or his resignation to God in a state of agony is styled in verse 90 as *ṣabrun jamīl* or endurance beautiful.

Joseph (Peace on him)

The leading figure in this chapter is Joseph, son of Jacob, round whom the entire narrative revolves. What the Qur'ān emphasises in respect of him are the qualities which distinguished his character, in particular, his uprightness, magnanimity, nobility of disposition, purity in thought and deeds, and implicit trust in God. It was the character such as he possessed, which sustained him in all the ordeals, through which he had to pass at different stages in his life, and rendered his life by way of a divine reward to him, a source of blessing to every one around him. The following verses in this chapter draw attention to the salient aspects of his character:- 21, 22, 23, 31, 33, 37, 42, 39, 54, 68, 89, 91, 92, 100 and 101.

The Wife of Potiphar

The love affair of Potiphar's wife with Joseph is described in the chapter in but broad outline. The Qur'ān intends it to serve a dual purpose. One is to show, through the behaviour

of Joseph, how a man who is sincerely devoted to God, is conscious of His presence in him in every sphere of his thought and activity, can with confidence and ease be a proof to all temptations. The other is to point out how a woman, who has conceived an inordinate passion for a man and resorted to various devices to entice him and failed to achieve her object, can on serious introspection turn her baffled passion for the man, who had withstood her temptation in the pursuit of purity of life, into an earnest admiration for him and pour affection and love for its own sake. In this connection the following verses deserve attention: 24 25, 32, and 51.

Interpretations of Sayings or Dreams

The expression *tā'wīl ul-aḥādīth* or literally interpretation of sayings, has occurred in this chapter in several places. In the Qur'änic sense, the term has a reference to a special form of knowledge, which enables one to read into the meaning of things, and reach right decisions in matters referred to one.

Joseph was born in Can'ān among a pastoral people, and had no opportunity to grow familiar with the ways of city life, or receive any training in statecraft: and yet, on coming into Egypt, he was suddenly called upon to take control of the affairs of the estate of his master Potiphar, and later on invested by Pharaoh with full authority, to rule over Egypt; and in either situation he rises equal to the occasion and proves himself to be a consummate and successful administrator. This he did through the exercise of the talent referred to above with which he was gifted by his Maker—the talent of seeing everything in right perspective, and reading into the meaning of things.

The commentators of the Qur'ān have, in general, taken the term *tā'wīl ul-aḥādīth* to mean interpretation of dreams, on the basis of the right interpretations that Joseph had given to the dreams of his co-prisoners in the Egyptian jail, and also to the dreams dreamt by Pharaoh. But the context in which the term has been repeatedly used in the Qur'ān has a wider significance as stated above.

Potiphar's Behaviour with his Wife

The subject of Potiphar's attitude towards the love affair of his wife with Joseph has puzzled the commentators of the Qur'ān; so much so that they have had to indulge in far-fetched surmises to explain it. So far as the Qur'ānic presentation of this subject is concerned, it makes it clear that Potiphar was full aware of the illicit passion, that his wife entertained for Joseph and the revengeful manner in which she behaved with him, when he would not yield to her temptation. Yet, the utmost that he could say of it when she pretended innocence was, "This is one of the guiles of you women, and great indeed are your guiles. O Joseph! Leave this affair and thou (O woman) ask pardon for thy crime, for thou indeed art one of those who have (knowingly) sinned." (Q. 12 : 28 and 29). He (Potiphar) lets off his wife and pursued her no further.

The commentators of the Qur'ān are surprised at this behaviour of Potiphar, but the surprise is not called for. They had no clear knowledge of the moral standards prevailing in the Egyptian society of Joseph's time. The picture of the social life of the ancient Egyptians, as has recently been afforded by research in Egyptology, as well as by certain pre-Christian Greek writings, is very much like that of the Romans in the time of Julius Caesar. Chastity was by no means a matter of serio[illegible] concern with the upper classes of society. In fact the o[illegible] amorousness displayed by society women at the banquet held in honour of Joseph was but a manifestation of prevailing fashion. It was why Potiphar took no serious notice of his wife's open attempts to entice Joseph. That is what the Qur'ān itself suggests by the manner of its treatment of this theme

It may be noted that the laxity in morals noticeable in the time of Potiphar continued to distinguish the social life of Egypt down to the time of Cleopatra. So, the attitude of Potiphar towards the behaviour of his wife should not be regarded as a matter of surprise by our commentators of the Qur'ān.

"Great indeed are your Guiles"

The above statement of Potiphar has been curiously taken by the commentators of the Qur'ān as the view advanced by the Qur'ān itself. On the basis of this wrong assumption, they argue that the Qur'ān holds that women, as a general rule, are more lax in morals than men, and are more ingenious in satisfying sex urges. They know that the Qur'ān designates the snare of Satan but a weak snare. When that is so, why do our commentators exalt women above Satan in vileness and say that it is what the Qur'ān does ? They should have known the place which the Qur'ān assigns to women in the scale of life. Wherever there is any reference to them in the Qur'ān it always accords to them the same rank or privilege as that accorded to men, and holds them equally responsible for what they do or speak.

The following verses bear out this fundamental attitude of the Qur'ān towards women: 4:32, 9:67, 71, 112, 66:5, 33:36, 2: 35 and 36).

The view which our commentators hold of women, bears resemblance to that held of them by the Christians, on the basis of the story of Adam given in the *Torah*. The story is that it was Eve who tempted Adam to touch the forbidden fruit. That is not the view which the Qur'ān takes of the occurrence. It holds both of them (Adam and Eve) equally responsible for having listened to Satan. It may be emphatically asserted that the Qur'ān never lends support to the view that women are weaker in morals than men.

The Name of the Wife of Potiphar

In the *Book of Genesis* (37:36), the name of the Egyptian nobleman, who had purchased Joseph as slave is given as Potiphar; but the name of his wife is not given therein. It will be interesting to know how the commentators of the Qur'ān came to give her the name of Zulaikha. The Qur'ān does not call her by any name. It simply refers to her as the wife of Potiphar.

The Dynasty in power in Egypt at the time of Joseph

The commentators of the Qur'ān have given out that the dynasty, which ruled over Egypt during the days of Joseph was 'Amāliqa otherwise known as Hyksos. Recent researches have disclosed that they came of a tribe, which originally had belonged to the Arab land and migrated to Egypt in ancient times. This tribe was of the stock of 'Āriba. The Copts may be regarded as the descendants of these migrants. It is significant that the ancient forms of Coptic and Arabic languages bear close resemblance to each other.

The Death of Joseph

The *Torah* gives out that Joseph was the ruler of Egypt till his death. The *Book of Genesis* gives the following account of what he had enjoined on his brothers and his children, when death approached him. The account runs :-

> And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. (*Genesis* 50: 24)

Evidently, his body was preserved as a mummy till Moses arrived in Egypt, about four hundred years after the death of Joseph. It was only when he brought the Israelites back to Can'ān, even as prophesied by Joseph, that the mummy of Joseph was taken away with him and buried in Can'ān.

PART XIII

Chapter XIII

THE THUNDER—AL-RA'D

CHAPTER XIII

THE THUNDER—AL-RA'D

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1–7

This chapter also is among those delivered at Mecca; and those addressed by it are the Meccan polytheists.

Even as other Meccan chapters, it deals with the basic doctrines of Islam. The main theme of the chapter is the conflict between the true and the false. In fact the chapter begins with a reference to this conflict :–

> And (bear it in mind) that which hath been sent down to thee from thy Lord is indeed the truth; but most people believe it not.

Indeed it strikes the same note in verse 40 at its close :-

> Thy task is nothing but to convey (Our directions) leading us to take account.

That truth will prevail and falsehood disappear is the law of life, which the Qur'ân emphatically asserts. If the call of this Book is based on truth, it will assuredly succeed in its object. On the other hand, if it is otherwise, it is bound to fail. This is the testimony of God. Let those who disregard the call wait for the result.

The first verse of this chapter declares, that the Qur'ân is not the result of any human thought. It is delivered by God and whatever He has delivered, is the truth. But its regret is that the majority addressed by it do not readily believe in it.

Earnestly does the Qur'ân draw their attention to the evidence of divine Unity furnished by nature itself; and every-one can behold it clearly. Everything that there is in the

universe argues by its very existence, that it has been brought into being by someone, who has the power to do so, and can exercise control over it. If one should ponder on the working of nature or of the phenomenal world, to which attention has been drawn in verses 2 to 4, one is bound to infer that it has not been created in vain, and that, on the other hand, it has some purpose to fulfil. Further, man is bound to recognise, that his existence is not limited to the life that he lives in the present, but that it extends beyond it, and that he has to enter upon another phase of life, which shall bring him face to face with his Creator.

The Qur'ān points out that everything in the universe is set in proper form and functions, under the supreme direction of its Creator. It is He, Who regulates the affairs of each object created by Him. The Qur'ān has repeatedly emphasised that there is an unchangeable law at work in life; so much so, that a good deed produces a good result, and an evil deed an evil result. Everything acts according to its nature. That is the truth which verse 11 emphasises:-

> Each hath in front of him and behind him forces, which watch over him by God's behest. God does not alter the state of a people until they themselves make a move to change it. When a people have to meet the consequences of any evil that they have wrought, God letteth (according to His scheme of life) an evil result overtake them. Thereafter, they shall have no protector besides Him.

The subject has already been discussed in detail in volume I in the chapter entitled 'Divine Providence,' pages 17–44.

Man is, therefore, responsible for what he does. The Qur'ān makes it clear that "God does not alter the state of a people unless they make a move to change it." Goodness is intrinsically productive of a good result. But if one makes a wrong use of it, goodness ceases to produce a good result. The truth has been

demonstrated by so many signs of God, but man has not paid the right attention to them as we have in verse 11. The subject has already been discussed at length in volume I under 'Divine Benevolence.'

When there is so much of clear evidence available to man to make him realise, that to God alone he owes his existence, and to Him alone shall he be accountable for what he does, how regretful is it that he should set up peers to God, and bow before them, and seek aid of those, who have not the power to offer any aid! To bring home this simple truth to them is it necessary, asks the Qur'ān in verse 14, for any one to work miracles by way of furnishing a proof thereof ?

The forces of nature operate to fulfil the purpose implicit in their nature. In their operation, they never vary. It being so, it is the duty of man to make the right use of them A right use causes a right effect. Any variation in its use reflects itself in the resulting effect. Hence, it is that the prosperity in life or the reverse of it, namely, misery, is the outcome of what one does to oneself. This law of life is applicable equally to the life of communities or nations.

The law as seen in verse 17 is based on facts of life noticeable in the phenomenon of the world, and noticeable to men of insight even in the life of man himself, that what is useful to human life survives, and what is hurtful to it eventually disappears or perishes. That is the lesson which the Qur'ān emphasises in reference to the conflict between the *false* and the *true*. This is the law of life which the Qur'ān styles as the law of survival of the useful. It is also styled as the 'Decree of God given in right form.'

Those who follow the guidance of God or conform to the law of life implicit in the divine scheme of things prosper, and those who go against it necessarily suffer as indicated in verse 18.

As an expression of Divine *Raḥmat* or Graciousness, points out the Qur'ān in verse 19, God has provided an unerring form

of guidance for mankind—the guidance of what is termed *wahi* or Revelation. In as much as, this Revelation has proceeded from one and the same source, namely God, the Creator and the Sustainer of everything in the universe, it has borne the same character whenever it has been delivered in the history of man, through what are called *rusul* or messengers of God, also styled as prophets. The concept of the Unity of God necessarily postulates the idea of Unity of Revelations.

Those who know what the law of life is, and conform to it, are likened (as in verse 19) to those who have eyes and see things; whereas those who go against are likened to the blind.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] Alif, Lām, Mīm, Rā.
These are the verses of the Book,
(the Qur'ān). And (bear it in mind)
that what hath been sent down to
thee from thy Lord is indeed the truth;
but most people believe it not.

[2] God it is, Who hath raised aloft
the heavens unsupported by any
pillars such as you can behold, and
assumed dominion over the world, and
directed the sun and the moon to function,
each for an appointed period.
He it is, Who hath settled everything in order,
and thus doth He make clear that
you have one day to meet your Lord.

[3] And He it is, Who hath stretched out
the earth and provided therein firm
mountains and rivers, and hath
caused fruits to grow therein in pairs.
(He hath so regulated the sun and moon that)
He causeth the night gradually to cover
the day. Verily in this are the signs
for those who care to reflect.

[4] And in the earth, there are
close to each other plots of land,
whereon grow gardens of grapes and
corn and palm trees, single or clustered,
all watered by the same water,
though some fruits are more tasteful
than others. Verily, in all these
there are significant signs for those
who care to understand.

[5] And if thou art inclined to
entertain anything strange, here is a saying
of theirs (the unbelievers) which is truly
strange: "What! When we are reduced to dust
(after death), shall we be brought to life again?"
These are they who do not expect
this from their Lord: and these are they,
round whose necks shall be halters:
and these are they who shall be the dwellers
of Fire; therein shall they dwell.

[6] (O Prophet!) They challenge
thee to hasten evil rather than good,
despite their knowledge of what had happened
in the past (to such challenges).
But thy Lord is truly merciful unto men,
in spite of their excesses, although
(when necessary) thy Lord is strict in chastisement.

[7] And they who believe not
(in the Prophet's message) say:
Why was not a sign sent down unto
him by his Lord?" Thou art only a warner,
and every people hath had a guide.

SECTION 2 : VERSES 8–18

[8] God knoweth what every female
species beareth, and how their wombs

lessen and enlarge; and with Him
everything is set according to a plan!—

[9] The Knower of the hidden and
the manifest, the Great, the Exalted!

[10] Alike to Him is the person among
you who concealeth his word and
he who speaketh it out, and he who hideth
himself in the sight, and he who
freely goeth about in the day.

[11] Each hath in front of him and
behind him forces (angels) which watch over him
by God's behest, God does not alter
the state of a people until they themselves
make a move to change it. When a people
have to meet the consequence of any evil
that they have wrought, God letteth
(according to his scheme of life)
an evil result overtake them. Thereafter,
they shall have no protector beside Him.

[12] He it is, Who, to cause fear and
hope in you, letteth flashes of lightning on you,
and raiseth up laden clouds.

[13] And the thunder of the clouds
voiceth His praise and so do the
angels for awe of Him and
He sendeth thunderbolts and with
them striketh whom He will.
But the disbelievers (out of sheer
perversity) wrangle about (the power
of) God, although (they should have
known) He is Mighty in His Power.

[14] Supplication to Him is supplication
indeed. And they to whom these people
(unbelievers) turn in supplication

beside Him scarcely can respond.
They (the unbelievers) resemble him,
who stretcheth out his hands (in sheer thirst)
towards water that it may reach his
mouth when it in fact cannot reach it.
The supplication of the unbelievers is
but sliding into the wrong track.

[15] And all that there is in the heavens
and on the earth bows down to God
in devotion, willingly or by constraint
(according to the laws of life fixed by God);
even the very shadows bow
down, morning and evening!

[16] Say, (O Prophet): "Who is
the Lord of the heavens and the earth?"
y: "God." Say: "Why then do
you look up to others for protection
beside God, who have not the power even
to help or harm themselves?"
Say: "Are the blind and the seeing in
a like position? Or, can the darkness and
the light be alike? Or, they,
who have been set up as peers to God,
create anything as He hath created,
so that their creation might appear to them
similar to His?" Say: "God is
the Creator of everything,
He is the One, the Omnipotent."

[17] He sendeth down rain from heavens;
then flow streams in due measure
with the flood bearing along a swelling
foam. Likewise from what is
melted in the fire so as to make of it
ornaments or utensils, a like scum arises.
In this way doth God suggest

the difference between truth and falsehood.
As to the foam, it is quickly gone
(as of no value to man): and as to
what is useful to man, it remaineth on
the earth. By such comparisons
doth God make things clear (to men).

[18] They who hearken to the behests
of their Lord shall have all that is
worth having. But they who do not
so hearken shall have in the end
a strict reckoning, although
they may be prepared to offer in ransom,
all that is in the earth and the like of it
added thereto, and Hell shall be
their abode—a wretched place to live in!

SECTION 3: VERSES 19-26

The Qur'ân now refers to the types of people who conform to the laws of life and prosper, as also to those types, who go against those laws and suffer in consequence. The nature of prosperity, which the first group of people achieve and the nature of suffering, which befalls the other group is also broadly indicated.

[19] (O Prophet!) Is he who knoweth
that what hath been sent to thee from
thy Lord is the truth, in the same position
as he who is blind (and cannot
see the truth). It is only men of insight
who can bear (this difference) in mind—

[20] They who fulfil their pledge to
God and do not break the covenant;

[21] And who join together what God
hath bidden to be joined, and who
fear their Lord and dread a strict reckoning,

[22] And who while yearning to behold the Countenance of their Lord, are constant amid trials, and observe prayer, and give to others, in secret and openly, out of what We have bestowed upon them and return good for evil—for them awaits the recompense of a final (happy) abode—

[23] Abiding gardens into which they shall enter, they and the righteous among their fathers, and their wives, and their descendants; and from every portal shall angels meet them,

[24] Saying, "Peace be unto you, for ye have endured all with steadfastness." How excellent is the final abode!

[25] And for those who break their covenant with God after having once given their word to respect it, and cut asunder that which God hath bidden to be joined together, and create disorder in the land, a curse awaiteth and a miserable abode.

[26] God provideth as He deems fit either liberally or sparingly; and they who rejoice in the (provision of) life present (should know that as compared to what is offered in the life Hereafter) is but a trifle—a little passing comfort.

SECTION 4: VERSES 27–31

[27] And they who believe not say: "Why is it that no (dazzling) sign from his Lord has been sent down to

him?" Say (O Prophet): "God will
let go astray whom He will, and will guide
Himself to him who turns to Him.

[28] "At rest in the thought of
God are the hearts of those, who
believe and turn to Him! Indeed,
the hearts of men feel at rest
in the thought of God!

[29] "They who believe and work
righteously—for them is bliss
and an excellent home to return to."

[30] Even as to the people gone
before We have sent thee to them
(of the people of your time) that thou
mightest rehearse to them the revelations
We have delivered to thee. But they believe
not in the God of mercy. Say: "He alone is
my Lord. There is no God but He.
In Him alone do I lay my trust. To
Him alone I have to return."

The closing lines of this chapter beginning with verse 31 emphasise that the Qur'ān was not delivered to move mountains to vindicate its authenticity. It was delivered to direct men to the path of righteous living. They who yield to its guidance will surely purify their lives and prosper. The function of the Prophet is just to carry its message, he is not to be influenced by any personal consideration. They who reject the message are themselves responsible for what they do. They will meet, soon or late, with the consequences which follow rejection. For his part, the duty of the Prophet is to go steadily on with the mission assigned to him, laying his full trust in God that one day his mission will triumph over all forces which may work against it. So it was. Indeed, during the very life-time of the

Prophet, the entire Arab land responded to his call, and all those who lived therein rallied round him to uphold the cause of the mission entrusted to him.

[31] Even if there were a Qur'ān
(other than what was delivered to
the Prophet of Islam) by which mountains
could be set in motion and the earth
traversed (briskly) by means of it,
or the dead made to speak,
(they would still not have believed in God).
Aye! All sovereignty truly belongeth to God.
(He certainly can let wonders work.
But that is not *Sunnat Allah*, His Way.
His Word is delivered to man
that he may act upon it and prosper).
Why then do even believers feel sad that God,
had He pleased, would certainly have
guided men aright. (But such was not
the way of God. His plan of life is to let
everyone be free to pursue any way
he likes, good or bad, and meet the consequence).
Dire chastisement will pursue the
unbelievers for what they have done and
visit itself even on their dwelling,
till what is held out by God comes to pass.
Verily, God does not withdraw
what He has held out.

SECTION 5: VERSES 32–37

[32] Even before thee, apostles have been
mocked at. But I gave long respites to
the unbelievers: and it was only
thereafter that I seized upon them—and
how strict was My Chastisement!

[33] Who is it then, who is keeping
a watch over every soul to mark
what one has derived by one's deeds?
Yet they have set up peers for God
(to whom they turn). Say: "Name them.
Will you inform God of what in
the earth He knoweth not?
Or is this all a mere empty talk?"
Nay, the contrivance of the unbelievers
looks fair seeming to them. (It is why)
they have held themselves back from taking to
the right path. To him whom God
hath given no guidance,
who is there to offer guidance?

[34] For them there shall be chastisement
in this world, to be followed by a
greater chastisement in the next; and
none can save them from the grip of God
(or from the operation of the divine laws of life)!

[35] The likeness of Paradise
promised to those, who live aright is that
of a garden, wherein flow streams,
and where fruits are ever fresh and
the shade of the trees perpetual. This is
what awaits those who are mindful of God.
But what awaits the unbelievers is Fire.

[36] They to whom We have given
the Book rejoice in what hath been sent down
to thee; yet some there are who
have banded together to deny a part of it.
Say to them: "I am commanded only to serve
God, and never to associate anything with
Him. To Him do I call you and to
Him alone do I turn."

[37] Thus, as a Code of conduct in the Arabic language have We sent down the Qur'ān. If after this knowledge hath come to thee, thou yield to their desires, thou shalt have no friend nor any protector except God.

SECTION 6: VERSES 38–43

[38] Truly have We sent apostles before thee and to them have We given wives and offspring. Yet it was not for any apostle to produce a proof (of the truth of his message) except by God's permission; but for every age there is a Code (for guidance).

[39] What God pleaseth will He wipe out or confirm: for with Him is the Source of all Revelation.

[40] Whether We let thee (live to see) the fulfilment of any part of what has been held out (as a recompense for wrong living), or We take thee hence, thy task is nothing but to convey (Our Directions), leaving Us to take account.

[41] Can they not visualise that We shall trench more and more on the territory (of the unbelievers) by cutting down its borders? When God issues forth a decree, there is none to go against it. And swift is He in reckoning.

[42] There have been people in the past who laid plots (against the prophets of their time). But it is God Who directeth (the sequel to) all such plots.

He knoweth everyone's doings,
and the unbelievers ere long shall
know for whom is reserved
the final (heavenly) abode.

[43] Say the unbelievers: "Thou
hast not been sent by God."
Say: "Betwixt me and you, sufficeth
the testimony of God and of every
one who knoweth the Book."

CHAPTER XIV

ABRAHAM—IBRĀHĪM

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1–6

This chapter deals in a general way with the advent of prophets and what happened to them in the pursuit of their mission and their achievements.

It begins with an account of what Moses had said to his people about the trials, which the prophets gone before him usually had to bear in the pursuit of their mission. This done, it draws attention to the call of the Qur'ān and to the response it evoked.

In the end, the fact is stressed, that the call of the Qur'ān is but a revival of the call, issued originally by Abraham, and was indeed its culmination and fulfilment. The chapter is addressed primarily to the leaders of the community of Quraish.

The Qur'ān is the Book of divine revelation and is meant to dispel darkness dwelling in the minds of men, by means of the light it offers. That is the call of the Qur'ān, a like of which had been issued before by Moses.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] Alif, Lām, Rā.

This is a Book which We have sent down
to thee, that thou mayst bring men
out of darkness into light by leave of their Lord—
into the path of the Mighty, the Praiseworthy—

[2] Of God, to Whom belongeth all
that there is in the heavens and in the earth.
And woe to the unbelievers!
There is severe chastisement for those,

[3] Who prefer the life of this world to
that of the Hereafter, and who prevent
others from pursuing the way of God
and seek to make it appear crooked.
It is people such as those
who have fallen into deep error.

[4] We have not sent any apostle to
any people except one born to their language,
so that he could explain to them
(Our Message) in a manner clear to them.
Therefore doth God let whom
He will go astray, and take to the right path whom
He wills: for He is the Mighty, the Wise.

In the last note given under the chapter 'Hūd' it had been explained, that certain annals of peoples gone before, were designated as *ayyām Allāh* or the Days of Allah. Moses had been asked through a revelation to remind his people of the *ayyām Allāh* and impress upon them, the truth of life which they conveyed, that success in life is for those only, who bear the trials of life manfully with implicit trust in God.

For generations, the Israelites had lived in Egypt in a depressed state. Naturally, they had developed a sense of frustration and felt forlorn. It was why Moses had been charged by God to invite them, to ponder on the events of bygone history and tell them, that if only they could take to the path of righteousness and learn to endure the trials of life with implicit trust in God, they would assuredly attain prosperity in life. Verse 5 pointedly draws attention to this fact of life.

In verses 6 and 7, the Qur'ān calls upon the Israelites to bear in mind, how graciously God had released them from the yoke of the Pharaohs, and brought them back to their ancestral homeland. It was upto them, therefore, to appreciate this divine favour in a worthy manner. The Arabic word *shukr* is usually translated as thankfulness. It however means appreciation in its broadest sense. Wherever the Qur'ān uses this term, it is meant to suggest that one should understand the value of everything in proper perspective. It is only then that one can profit by it. On the other hand, if any one fails to appraise a thing at its true value, he should not expect to profit by it. Whenever a blessing is conferred on any people by God, they should appreciate its value to their life and conduct themselves accordingly. That is *shukr* in its right sense. Failure to do so will involve inevitable suffering.

[5] Of old did We send Moses with Our Directions, saying: "Bring forth thy people from darkness into light and call to their mind *ayyām Allāh*, the Days of God (of the different periods in their history during which God had meted out to them what they deserved, either happiness or misery, according to their deeds, so that they might take a lesson from them). Verily, in this there are signs for every patient and grateful person.

[6] And call to mind the occasion when Moses said to his people, "Remember God's Kindness to you, when He rescued you from the hold of the people of Pharaoh, who had subjected you to a cruel oppression, slaughtering your male children and suffered only your females to live." In this, truly, was a tremendous trial from your Lord.

SECTION 2 : VERSES 7–12.

[7] And call to mind the occasion when your Lord had proclaimed "If you feel grateful, then will I surely increase (My Favours) to you; but if you are thankless, then My Chastisement will indeed be severe."

The Qur'ān then states in a general way what had happened to the prophets of yore, by pointing out that everyone of them had to bear the same style of experience. One and all had to counter the same kind of obstacles placed across their path. One and all faced every adverse situation with courage and pursued their task in the firm conviction, that success was theirs at the end. Indeed, everyone of them had the satisfaction to see in their very life-time the fulfilment of their mission. It is to the account of the prophets such as noted above, that Moses draws attention in these verses. The history of a good many of the peoples, among whom the prophets had worked was known both to the Israelites and the people of Egypt. Everyone of the peoples concerned at first did not recognise truth advanced by their prophets; but the prophets went on nevertheless calling upon their people, to reflect whether they could by any means doubt the existence of God, the Creator of all that there is in the heavens and the earth. This simple statement draws attention in a concise manner to all that is advanced in support of the existence of a Being, Who controls the life of everything in the universe. For a fuller exposition of this subject refer to what has been stated in volume I of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*—commentary of the 'Sūrat al-Fātiha.'

[8] And Moses said: "If you and all those who are on the earth together feel thankless to God, Who is Self-Sufficient, the Praiseworthy (it will matter nothing): (but for the deprival of

favours and the consequent suffering
man alone is responsible)."

[9] Hath not the story reached
you of those who had gone before you—the
people of Noah and 'Ād and Thamūd,
and of those who came after them and
about whom no one hath knowledge
except God. Their apostles came to
them with clear proofs of their
missions. But they rebuffed their
apostles and said "We believe not what
you have brought with you; and we
entertain grave doubts in respect of what
you invite us to accept "

[10] Said their apostles: "Have you
any doubts concerning God Who hath
made the heavens and the earth? He
calleth you that He may cover up
some of your sins and give you respite
for a term (that ye may have time to
make amends)" They said: "You are
like us but mere human beings; you
would like to hinder us worshipping what
our fathers have worshipped.
Well then produce some proof (in
your support)."

[11] In reply, said their apostles to them:
"True, that we are mere human beings
even like yourselves, but God bestoweth
favours on such of His servants as He liketh;
and it is not in us to bring you any proof
except by the leave of God. Let the
believers, therefore, only rely on God."

Verse 12 refers to a common utterance of prophets : "What aileth us that we should not put our trust in God, when He has already given us guidance in our affairs." The divine guidance referred to here has very often been taken by our commentators to mean the guidance of revelation or *wahī* ; whereas the reference in reality is to the general law of growth and development at work in life. Everything is endowed with a talent ingrained in it. It will manifest itself whenever invoked and fulfils the purpose it has to serve in life. The prophets had to bear in the course of their mission, a variety of arduous trials ; but they all endured them with becoming patience in the earnest trust, that God would reward their patience and endurance in a worthy manner, and grant success to them in their noble endeavours. The reference is clearly to the law of requital at work in life and not to the guidance of *wahī* or revelation.

Verse 19 draws attention to another truth of life, and it is that everything in the heavens and the earth has been created in right form and has to serve a specific purpose. Mankind also has to serve a specific purpose in the divine scheme of things. Should any generation of them fail to serve the purpose, the law of life is that they will be replaced by another generation better fitted to fulfil it.

[12] "And what aileth us that we should
not put our trust in God, when He has
already given us guidance in our affairs.
And we will with confidence bear patiently
any wrong that you may do us. Let
the truthful, therefore, rely in trust in God."

SECTION 3 : VERSES 13–21

[13] And the unbelievers said to their
apostles : "We will certainly drive you
out from our land unless you return to our faith."
Thereupon their Lord sent them the message :
"Of a surety We will destroy the unruly :

[14] "And We will certainly cause you to dwell in the land after them. This shall be the recompense of those, who stand in awe before My Seat of Authority and dread My Decree!"

[15] Then sought they (the apostles) help from God (against the unbelievers); and everyone who was stubbornly proud perished:

[16] Before him is Hell; and he shall be given hot water to drink;

[17] He shall drink it in gulps and shall scarcely swallow it. From every side shall death assail him and yet will he not die, and a grievous chastisement shall pursue him.

[18] The works of those who do not believe in their Lord are like the ashes which a wind bloweth away on a stormy day; they shall not get anything in return for their works, as it is now beyond their reach. This is the state into which one falls by taking to the wrong way.

[19] Seest thou not, that God has set the heavens and the earth in proper form? Should He like it, He can make you die out and replace you by a new set of people.

[20] And this is by no means difficult for God to effect.

Verse 21 draws attention to the primary weakness of those who take to the wrong path in life. The weakness is this: they allow themselves blindly to be led by unscrupulous leaders of diverse sorts, and render themselves incapable of thinking out things for themselves. They hardly realise that the leaders who have misled them could not save them, from the chastisement

that awaits them for yielding to wrong lead. In fact on the Day of Judgement, these very leaders who cannot save themselves from the consequence of their own evil leadership, will come forth to disown whom they have misled. The reference here is particularly to the Quraish leaders of Mecca, who had tried to spread disaffection among the Arab tribes against the mission of the Prophet of Islam.

The Qur'ān has in diverse places emphasised that belief in God generates an abiding sense of inward peace. Hence it is that those who believe in God and live aright will enter Paradise, where the entire atmosphere will seem charged with the comforting note of 'Peace.'

[21] When all mankind shall appear before God, the weak among them shall say to those who were proud of their might: "We just followed you; will you not then avert at least in some degree the chastisement of God." They will say: "Had God opened out for us a way of escape, we too would have shown you a way out. (At the moment we ourselves are in deep distress). It is all the same to us whether we bear it patiently or grow restive, there is no escape for us from the chastisement."

SECTION 4: VERSES 22–27

[22] And when the doom came to pass, Satan said: "Verily, God gave a true promise (and it was fulfilled). And I too made a promise to you but I failed to make it good. I had no hold on you to make you do a thing; I simply called on you (to go a certain way) and you yielded.

Therefore, do not blame me; you will have to blame yourselves. Neither can I come to your help, nor you to mine. For my part, I never believed that I was ever equal to God as you had thought of me in the past. (I disown myself from that accusation."
As for those who do wrong to themselves there awaiteth a hard tribulation.

[23] As for those who have believed and done what was right; they have been given entrance into gardens wherein flow streams; therein shall they abide for ever, greeted from every side with the greetings of "Peace."

Verses 24 to 27 draw attention to a fundamental aspect of the teaching of Islam. But the regret is, that our commentators of the Qur'ān have not taken the trouble to appraise at its proper value its great significance to human life. The Qur'ān calls on man to make it clear to him the distinction between what is of permanent value to him in life and what is not. It is only the good that one does, that abides with him here and in the Hereafter; whereas everything else that he does, keeps him in a forsaken state here and in the Hereafter. The truth is illustrated by comparing the good that one does to a flourishing tree deep rooted and the reverse of it, which is compared to a tree which can easily be pulled up since it has no stability in it.

The parable of the unstable tree, which does not flourish is likened to the leaders of the tribe of Quraish, who would not follow the word of truth and had in consequence to meet disaster. As against this, the parable of a prosperous tree deep rooted likens those Meccans, who had chosen to follow the word of truth delivered by the Prophet. It is they who deserve stability in life. To them the advice is offered, that they should

be regular in their devotion to God, and share with the needy and the depressed, what God had provided them with.

[24] Seest thou not that God likeneth a good word to a good tree with its roots fixed firmly and its branches stretching towards the sky,

[25] Yielding fruits in all seasons by the will of its Lord? God setteth forth similitudes for men that haply they may reflect.

[26] And the likeness of an evil word is that of a worthless tree let loose from the surface of the earth with no strength to stand upright.

[27] God giveth stability to those, who believe by His Stable Word in this life and in the next: but to the unruly shall He cause to err: God doeth as He liketh.

SECTION 5: VERSES 28-34

[28] (O Prophet!) Hath thou not noticed the state of those, who have repaid the goodness of God with thanklessness, and dragged their people into the state of perdition—

[29] Into Hell? Therein they shall enter—a wretched abode indeed.

[30] They have set up peers for God to lead men astray from His path. Say: "Enjoy your pleasures for a while, but your ultimate wending shall be towards the Fire."

> [31] (O Prophet !) Speak to those of my servants who are believers, that they observe prayer and give to others, secretly and openly, out of what We have provided to them, before the Day comes when neither any transactions (with others) nor friendship shall avail.

Verse 32 refers to the Principle of Providence, which underlines the provision to every object of creation of all that it needs, for its growth and development. Man can easily recognise this fact of life by a reference to his own individual needs. Everyone of his needs is attended to by Nature. Indeed if one should reflect over the working of the universe one can realise that all, that there is in the heavens and in the earth is intended to subserve one's existence. Man can easily infer that this vast and comprehensive system of providence must have been devised by One, Who hath the power to do so, and would hardly have been devised by anyone, who hath no power to fulfil even his own needs, but who had to look up to his Maker to satisfy them. The Qur'ānic argument in this regard is summed up pithily in but a few words in verse 34 :

> And of everything you ask Him giveth He to you, and if you would reckon at the favours of God, you cannot count them.

The import of this statement has been discussed at length in *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, Vol. I.

The Qur'ān observes that despite all that has been done for man by Providence, man has very often proved himself ungrateful. The observation has a reference to the Quraish in Mecca in particular, who all belonged to the progeny of Prophet Abraham, in response to whose prayer, God had bestowed on them all the means of comfort that they needed. Yet his very progeny, namely the Quraish, had gone against the faith of their ancestor and taken to idolatry and wicked living. Not

merely this, they were the foremost to revolt against and combat a revival of their ancestral faith through the revelation of the Qur'ān.

[32] It is God Who hath created the heavens and the earth, and sendeth down water from above, and so bringeth forth the fruit for your food ; and He hath subjected to you the ships, so that by His Command, they pass through the sea ; and He hath subjected the rivers to you ;

[33] And He hath subjected to you the sun and the moon in their constant courses : and hath subjected the day and the night to you :

[34] And of everything which you ask Him, giveth He to you ; and if you would reckon up the favours of God, you cannot count them ! Surely man is unjust, ungrateful !

SECTION 6 : VERSES 35-41

[35] Call to mind the occasion when Abraham prayed ; "O my Lord ! Make this city (Mecca) a place of peace. And turn me aside and my children from worshipping images.

[36] "O my Lord ! They (images) have verily led many people astray. Therefore, he who follows me, verily he shall be of me. As for him who disobeys me (I scarcely can say anything). But thou art Forgiving. Merciful.

[37] "Our Lord ! Verily I have settled some of my offspring in a valley that has lain barren lying close to Thy Holy Place, so that, our Lord ! they may observe prayer regularly. May thou turn the hearts of men

towards them, and provide them with
means of sustenance (from out of the barren
valley) that they may be thankful.

[38] "Our Lord! Thou truly knowest
what we hide and what we disclose, for,
nothing in the earth or in the heavens is
hidden from God."

[39] (Said Abraham): "Praise be to God
Who hath, in old age, given me Ishmael
and Isaac. Verily my Lord hearkeneth to prayer.

[40] "My Lord! Let me and my posterity
remain constant in prayer, our Lord!
and grant this my petition.

[41] "Our Lord! Cover us with
mercy—me, my offspring and
all believers—on the Day of reckoning."

SECTION 7: VERSES 42–52

[42] Think thou not that God
is unheedful of what the wicked do.
He only giveth them a respite till the Day
(when the result of their deeds overtakes
them and) their eyes shall stare up (in surprise),

[43] Rushing hither and thither,
their heads turned up with looks rivetted
and their minds stunned (in stupefaction).

[44] (O Prophet!) Warn men therefore
of the Day when chastisement shall overtake
them and the wicked shall say:
"Our Lord, respite us yet a little while;
to Thy call will we hearken and
obey the apostles." (But they will
promptly receive the reply): "Did ye not

wantonly swear by yourselves before
that you shall never have a fall
(for what you were doing)?

[45] "(Is it not that) ye chose to
dwell with those who were unjust to themselves,
and that We made it plain to you how
We had dealt with them (for what
they had done to themselves),
by drawing your attention to what
had happened in similar situations?"

[46] (You knew that) they had
resorted to every stratagem—stratagems
such as could shake mountains;
but (they hardly know that) their success
depended on God (and not on them).

[47] Think not then that God
will fail to fulfil the promise held out to
His apostles. Aye! God is Mighty,
able to let evil recoil on the evil-doer.

The closing lines of this chapter remind man, that a day of requital awaits him, the Day of resurrection, when he shall have what he has worked for in his present life. The Qur'ān has made clear to everyone, what one has to guard against with implicit trust in God.

[48] (Think of) the Day when the earth
shall be given form other than that of
the earth, and heavens also,
when men shall appear before God,
the One, the All-Powerful.

[49] Thou shalt see the wicked
bound in chains—

[50] Clothed in garments of pitch
with fire covering their faces—

[51] That God may give everyone
what he has worked for. Verily
God is prompt at reckoning.

[52] This is a message for mankind
that they may be warned thereby
(against evil living), and that
they may know that God is but One, and
that men of understanding may reflect over it.

CHAPTER XV

THE ROCK—AL-HIJR

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1: VERSES 1–15

The Qur'ān has repeatedly emphasised that perspicuity is its leading feature. In other words, it is clear in its expression and is easy to understand. This peculiarity or characteristic of the Qur'ān, is noticeable not only in the presentation of its themes, but in the very simplicity of the ideas which constitute every theme presented. It is its perspicuity, which in reality forms its major attraction for everyone, who approaches it with an open mind. It is why the Qur'ān calis itself as 'the light,' because no one fails to notice a light and recognise it as such. Of course, there were and there still are people, who despite this quality of the Qur'ān and the clearness of its message, have wilfully declined to acknowledge its value to life. But it is clear that an attitude such as this will soon or late bring them regrets.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] Alif, Lām, Rā.
These are the verses of the Scripture,
and (of) a Qur'ān, and make clear reading.

PART XIV

Chapter XV

THE ROCK—AL-HIJR

(Contd.)

[2] The time is coming when
those who believe not will wish
that they had been Muslims.

[3] (O Prophet!) Leave them to themselves
to feast and enjoy (what they may);
and let them beguile themselves
with idle hopes. But the time is not far
off when they shall realise
(how futile were their hopes).

[4] We have never destroyed the people
of any town, except in the manner decreed,
(the law of life being that whenever
a people create a particular situation for
themselves, the consequence thereof
shall follow as a matter of course),

[5] No people can ever forestall
the inevitable nor put it off.

[6] (O Prophet!) They say (to thee):
"O thou who, (as thou sayeth),
hath been charged with the task of warning us,
thou art (in our view) clearly a mad man.

[7] "(If thou really speaketh the truth),
why then dost thou not bring angels with
thee (in support of what thou sayest?"

[8] We do not send down angels except
when it is truly necessary; and
when these have to descend, they
(the unbelievers) shall have no respite.

[9] Without doubt, it is We
Who have sent down this warning, and
without doubt, it is We
Who shall see it implemented.

[10] (O Prophet!) We have already sent
apostles before thee among the people gone by;

[11] And never came to them any
apostle whom they did not deride.

[12] It is in this manner that
the hearts of the unbelievers (of the time of
the Prophet) are at work;

[13] And such has been the habit of
those (unbelievers) who have gone before.

[14] Even were We to open
out above them a gate into heaven,
and they were to go on mounting to it,

[15] They would yet say: "Our sight
is blocked, nay! We are bewitched."

SECTION 2 : VERSES 16-25

In verse 16 of this chapter, as also in two other places in the Qur'ān (25: 61, 85: 1), the term *burūj* has been used. Since this term was used by the ancients to mean the signs of the zodiac, the point to consider is, whether the term should carry this sense or should it merely bear the etymological sense of bright stars, which guide the traveller during night hours both on land and sea.

The division of the zodiac into twelve parts or signs was at first made by the Babylonians and the Assyrians, and eventually it was reduced to a system by the Greeks. The Arabic language was in ancient times current in Iraq, Syria and Egypt with which the Arabs had a long-standing contact. It is quite possible therefore that this term *burūj* meaning the zodiac signs was known to the Arabs, but the pre-Islamic literature of Arabia does not, however, bear this out. 'Abdur Raḥmān bin 'Umar aṣ-Ṣufī in *Ṣuwar al-Kawākib*, has given a list of nearly two hundred and fifty names of constellations known to the ancient or

the pre-Islamic Arabs. But there is no mention therein of the zodiac signs. Tabrezi has, on the authority of 'Abdu'l 'Ula stated that the Arabs were not aware of this in ancient times.* So it seems that it is safe to give meaning to the term as used in the Qur'ān only in its etymological sense. It should therefore mean bright stars. In fact it is stated that this was the view taken by Ibn 'Abbās. Naturally in our translation of the verse concerned, we have taken *burūj* to mean bright stars.

The stellar world presents a beauteous spectacle. This and similar aspects of Nature are very often cited by the Qur'ān to impress upon men, that these several beautiful aspects of Nature should suggest to them, that a principle of beauty is at work in creation, and that on that account should suggest that it is the work of a Maker, Who likes everything that He has brought into being should possess some aspect of beauty. The investing of every created object with beauty is itself a clear manifestation of graciousness or mercy, which God desires to bestow on every object of His creation. This aspect of divine mercy has been discussed at proper length in volume I of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*. It is in this sense that the principle of beauty at work in the stellar world prevents any development therein, such as may mar that beauty or disturb its movements. The same principle of beauty has manifested itself in form and composition of the earth, on which everything is provided in right proportion and right quantity, for the benefit of all those who dwell therein. This subject has been discussed at length under chapter 'Providence' in volume I of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*.

[16] We have verily set constellations
in heaven, and decked them out for the beholders,

[17] And protected them
from every accursed devil,

[18] Save one who stealthily heareth
and whom doth a bright flame pursue.

* *Sharh Al-Tabrezi 'Ala Al-Hamasa*, Vol. 3, p. 135, Egypt.

[19] And the earth have We stretched forth
and fixed mountains therein, and caused
therein to grow everything in a form
suited to its nature.

[20] And We have provided them as
sustenance for you and also for those
whom you do not provide for.

[21] Not a thing is there which is not with
Us in abundance; and We provide it
not except in appropriate measure.

[22] And We send forth moisture-laden
winds and then let water pour in from
above, and of it do We give you to drink;
and it is not you who have stored it.

[23] And it is We Who indeed
bring a thing to life, and it is
We Who cause it to die, and it is
We alone Who outlive everything.

[24] And of a surety, We know
those of you who come first, and
of a surety those of you who come later:

[25] And indeed thy Lord will gather
them together, for He is truly Wise, Omniscient.

SECTION 3: VERSES 26–44

The story of Adam and Iblīs follows to emphasise that those of the progeny of Adam, who go the way of Iblīs or Satan will meet with suffering, both here and in the Hereafter; and likewise those who withstand the influence of Satan and take to the right way will prosper. This shall be true of individuals as of communities or nations.

[26] Of a surety, We created man
of hard clay, moulded out of black loam;

[27] And the jinn, We had created
before of the heat of hot winds.

[28] And when thy Lord said to
the angels: "Verily, I am about to create
man of hard clay moulded out of black loam,

[29] "And when I shall have shaped him
and breathed into him My Spirit,
then bow ye all down to him."

[30] So all the angels together bowed down

[31] All except Iblīs. He [illegible]
be of those who [illegible]ved down.

[32] God said: "O Iblīs! Why is it that
thou dost not join those who have bowed down?"

[33] He said: "It beseemeth not
me to bow down to man whom Thou hast
made of hard clay moulded out of black loam."

[34] He said: "Begone thou hence,
for thou art indeed accursed,

[35] "And indeed the curse shall lie on
thee till the Day of reckoning."

[36] He said: "O my Lord! respite me then
till the day when the dead shall be raised."

[37] He said: "Respite then shalt thou have—

[38] "Till the Day already announced."

[39] He (Iblīs) said: "Since Thou hast
beguiled me, I will make the world
fair-seeming to men on the earth and I
will surely beguile them all,

[40] "Save those of them who shall be Thy devoted servants."

[41] He (God) said: "The right way with me is this—

[42] "Over none of My servants shalt thou have power except over those who, being beguiled, shall follow thee—

[43] "And verily, Hell shall be the promised abode for them all;

[44] "It hath seven portals, each allotted a section of them to enter through."

SECTION 4: VERSES 45–60

[45] Without doubt, the pious will dwell amid gardens and fountains, (and they shall be greeted):

[46] "Enter ye in peace secure"—

[47] And We shall remove from their bosoms every rancour (that might have lurked therein): they will sit together on couches, face to face as brothers (to each other).

[48] Therein no weariness shall come upon them, nor shall they ever be taken out of it.

Three instances of communities, who had yielded to the promptings of evil are referred to here, the people of Lot, the tribe of Madian and the Thamūd.

[49] (O Prophet!) Announce to My servants that, verily, I am the Forgiving, the Compassionate,

[50] And that, nevertheless, My Chastisement is indeed a grievous chastisement.

[51] And tell them also of what transpired between Abraham and his guests.

[52] When they came to him, they said: "Peace on you." Said he: "We feel apprehensive (at your presence)."

[53] They said: "Fear not, for we bring thee the good tidings of a son, (being born to you) gifted with deep insight."

[54] He said: "Bring ye these tidings to me when old age hath already come upon me. What will these tidings mean to me at such a time?"

[55] They said: "Rest assured! The tidings are genuine. Do thou not therefore despair?"

[56] Said he: "(Nay! I do not despair) who despaireth of the mercy of his Lord except they who waver in their trust?"

[57] He said (to them): "O ye sent ones! have you any further purpose (in coming here)?"

[58] They said: "We have been sent to a folk condemned (for their sins),

[59] "In order that we may rescue the family of Lot,

[60] "Save his wife in respect of whom it has been decreed, that she shall be of those, who are to be left out."

SECTION 5: VERSES 61–79

[61] So when the sent ones (the angels) came to the family of Lot,

[62] Said he: "Ye are a folk unknown."

[63] They said: "Yes! but
we have brought for you the news of
that happening in respect of which
they (the unbelievers) were in doubt:

[64] "And we have brought thee
the news of what is certain to happen
and we speak the truth.

[65] "Therefore lead forth thy family
at night, sometime before dawn, and
follow thou in their rear, and let none of
you look back, but pass
ye on whither ye are directed."

[66] And this message We communicated
to him (Lot) that by the morning
they shall be cut off to the last man.

[67] In the meanwhile the people of
the city came out (of their houses)
rejoicing at the news (of the
arrival of beautiful lads).

[68] Lot said to them: "These people
are my guests: therefore disgrace me not.

[69] "And fear God and do not put me to shame."

[70] They said: "Had we not forbidden
thee to entertain anyone from outside,
and had told thee that shouldst
thou do so, we would be free to make
use of them in any manner we liked?"

[71] He said to them (pleadingly):
"Here are my daughters (the young
unmarried girls eligible for marriage)
if ye care to turn to them"—

[72] (At this rebuff of Lot),
surely as thou livest, (O Prophet !) these
people in their blind lust behaved bewilderingly.

[73] So (as a chastisement for
their wicked habit) a terrible noise
shook them at sunrise:

[74] And We turned the city upside down
and rained upon them blocks of clay stone.

[75] Verily, in this are signs for those
who have the talent to probe the reality.

[76] And this (the ruined city)
lay on the high road.*

[77] Verily in this lies a sign
for men of faith.

[78] The inhabitants of *Al-Aikah*
(the people of the thick woods) were also
undoubtedly a wicked people.

[79] So We dealt out chastisement to
them also and verily (the ruins of)
the two cities may still be seen on the high road.**

SECTION 6: VERSES 80–99

[80] And the people of *Hijr* had
treated God's messengers as liars:

[81] And though We brought forth to
them Our Signs, they drew back from them.

[82] And for their security, they hewed
out for their abodes in the mountains,

* The road that lies between Arabia and Palestine.

** On the same route but lying on the shore of the Red Sea.

[83] But a terrific noise shook
them at early morn;

[84] And all that they had done
availed them not.

The closing passage is addressed to the Prophet of Islam and his early followers in Mecca, who had staunchly stood by him, with a view to heartening them in the pursuit of their mission. It reminds them that they have received the 'seven oft-repeated verses'* and the grand Qur'ān, and so they should not feel dejected or depressed at the misbehaviour of their detractors. As it has always happened in the affairs of men, when the issue between good and evil is resolved, it is truth which always triumphs.

[85] We have not created the heavens and
the earth and all that there is in between
them except in a right form for a right purpose.
And verily the hour of (Judgement)
shall surely come; wherefore do thou
(O Prophet!) forgive (those who have wronged
thee) with becoming forgiveness.

[86] Verily thy Lord!
He is Omniscient Creator.

[87] Of the oft-repeated verses, We have
already given thee seven (as a *sūra*
by itself, al-Fātiḥa), and the magnificent Qur'ān.

[88] Do not vex thy sight at what
We have bestowed on some of them

* The reference is to the chapter 'Al-Fatiha' or the first chapter of the Qur'ān, which consists of but seven verses. They constitute the very essence of the Qur'ān and on that account form an integral part of a Muslim's daily prayer. The tradition goes that in as much as these seven verses are together in the form of an invocation to God, the Prophet used to recite them with one deliberation with a noticeable pause at the end of each verse.

(who are employing it to thwart your mission);
and be not grieved on their account
but give thy full attention to the faithful.

[89] And say: "I am but a plain admonitor."

[90] (O Prophet! This revelation
came unto you) as had been sent to
those (the Jews and the Christians)
who fostered divisions,

[91] By displacing the different parts of
their scriptures (to suit their purposes).

[92] By the Lord! We will
surely call them all to account,

[93] For what they were doing.

[94] Speak out what thou hast been
bidden to do and keep away
from those who set up peers for God.

[95] Verily, We will suffice thee (as
defender against those who jeer at thee)—

[96] They who set up peers for
God—they shall before long
know (the result of their folly).

[97] We indeed know that thy
heart is distressed at what they say.

[98] But (for thy part) do thou go
on extolling thy Lord, and
be of those who bow down in devotion.

[99] And continue to serve thy Lord
till the hour of certainty comes to thee.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BEE—AL-NAḤL

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1-9

This is one of the chapters which were delivered in the closing years of the Meccan period of the prophetic mission.

Amr Allāh or the judgement of God will suddenly come to pass. The decree is that the call of the divine message is bound to be heard one day, and all attempts to silence it will fail inevitably. This truth of life is styled by the Qur'ān as *qaḍā bil-ḥaq* or the decree of truth. The detractors of the Prophet used to jeer at his pronouncement and say, if it was so, why was it that the doom with which they were warned did not come to pass without delay. It has already been pointed out in several places before in the earlier chapters, that for everything divinely ordained there is a time fixed for it. In this chapter, it is announced that the time fixed for the promised doom has arrived, for, the opposition to the Prophet's mission has now taken an extreme form and cannot sustain itself any longer. The followers of the Prophet could not persuade themselves to stay in Mecca any further. The decree of God was, therefore, that they should betake themselves to another place, from where they could pursue their mission in an atmosphere of comparative security.

The Qur'ān has styled the divine revelation as His Spirit or His *Rūḥ*. There could be no better style of address for it. The revelation is an invisible entity. But the heart or the mind on which it descends gets suffused with it and from where it strikes its notes. Indeed, revelation is styled as *Rūḥ* also

because it stimulates in man a life of purity or goodness (Q. 8: 24). It is why Jesus Christ called revelation which descended on him as the holy spirit or *Rūḥ u'l-quds*. This is the sense given to it by Christ's apostles also although the followers of Christ in later times fell into speculation about it.

It has been pointed out in verse 2 that it is the way of God to select one of His servants, as He pleaseth, for the conferment on him of the privilege of revelation, the main purpose of which is to impress upon mankind the truth, that there is none worthy of worship except God, and that it is incumbent on man to be mindful of Him and desist from evil living.

From verse 3 onwards, the Qur'ān advances arguments in support of this divine contention. It contends that everything created in the universe, is brought into being in proper form, or in right proportion, and is invested with talents or qualities appropriate to its nature.

Verse 4 points out that man, created though from a mere germ, possesses the intellectual talent at times, to question everything and indulge in disputation. But he should bear in mind, that when everything is created in right form and for the benefit of man, any revelation that proceeds from Him for the guidance of man, is in itself a source of right direction to him in life. It is not, therefore, meet for man to deny the fact of life, that there is none except God Who sustaineth and controlleth life in every form and, therefore, has to be tacitly obeyed in everyone of His directions to man. Man should recognise as a corollary to this, that he has been granted not only life but a way of living aright as well, which revelation always points to. The entire panorama of Nature is the proof of the graciousness of its Creator, and man should seek guidance and help from his Creator, and never attempt to set up peers for him.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] The Decree of God will certainly come to pass. So you need not prompt it—glory

be to Him! He is far above those whom they set up as peers to Him.

[2] By His Behest doth He cause the angels to descend with His Spirit (or divine revelation) on whomsoever of His servants He pleaseth to let them warn: "Except Me there is no God; therefore be mindful of Me." (and desist from evil living).

[3] He hath created the heavens and the earth with purpose; He is far above those whom they set up as peers to Him.

[4] He hath created man from a mere germ; yet, he behaves as an open disputant.

[5] And the cattle, hath He created for you: in them ye have warm garments and gainful uses; and some of them ye use for food.

[6] And they beseem you well (are pleasing to your sight) when you fetch them home (in evenings after they have grazed in pastures), and also when (in the morning) you drive them forth to pastures.

[7] And they (the cattle) carry your heavy loads to (distant) towns which you cannot reach otherwise except with much personal discomfort to yourselves: truly your Lord is Graciously Merciful.

[8] And of these (hath He provided you with) horses, mules and asses that you may ride them and to give you dignity: and He hath created (many other) things of which you have no knowledge.

[9] And it is for God to point out the right way, for, of the several ways (before man), there are some which are crooked. Had He pleased, He could surely have guided you all aright.

SECTION 2 : VERSES 10–21

[10] It is He, Who sendeth down water from the heavens: there is from it drink for you; and by it grows the herbage by which you pasture (your cattle).

[11] By it too He causeth corn and olive and date palm and the grapes to grow for you and all kinds of fruit. Verily, herein is a sign for those who reflect.

[12] Mark! He hath pressed to your service the night and the day; and likewise do the sun and the moon and the stars all function at His Command. Verily, herein is a sign for those who are endued with understanding.

[13] And all that He hath created for you in the earth is of varied hues: verily, herein is a sign for those who can appreciate (divine blessing).

[14] And He it is Who hath subjected for you the sea, that you may have for your food fresh fish out of it, and bring forth therefrom, what you may use for your ornaments. Thou seest how ships plough the billows to carry you forward in quest of His Bounty and that haply ye may give thanks.

[15] And He hath set firm mountains on the earth lest it shake you: and rivers and tracks (hath He provided) to help your movements.

[16] And also landmarks. Nay! by the stars too men may find their way.

[17] Shall He then Who createth and he who cannot create anything be given the same regard? Can ye not exercise discretion?

[18] And if you care to count the favours of God, you can never do so. (Rest assured you cannot count them all): Indeed God is Graciously Merciful.

[19] And God knoweth, what you hide and what you disclose.

[20] The gods whom they call on beside God can create nothing! They themselves are created!

[21] Dead are they—absolutely without life! They cannot even know, when they will be raised.

SECTION 3: VERSES 22–25

[22] Your God is God, the One! And they who believe not in the Hereafter, their hearts are given to denial, and are stiff-necked.

[23] Doubtless God knoweth what they hide and what they disclose: truly He disliketh the stiff-necked.

Doing evil or going against divine directions is designated in verse 28 as 'wronging themselves' or acting unjustly towards their own souls.

The passage, from verse 24 to 28, gives the picture of two sets of people—one of those who live wrongly and the other of those who live righteously. The first group of people look upon the divine revelation, or what is stated through it, as but an idle story of the past, whereas the other set of people look upon it (and whatever is stated through it) as a source of guidance for man and is wholly good. The first set of people, through the

wickedness they pursue, die or perish in their state of wickedness; whereas the other group of people breathe their last in a state of bliss, for having lived a life of purity and devotion to all that is good in life. The recompense of the first group will correspond to the life they have lived here and is styled Hell. On the other hand, the recompense of those who have lived aright is called Paradise or the garden of bliss.

[24] And when it is asked of them: "What is this that your Lord hath sent down?" They say: "Mere fables of the people gone-by."

[25] (This being their reply), they shall in the Day of Resurrection bear not only their own burden but of those, whom in ignorance, they have misled. Behold! how grievous the burdens they shall have to bear.

SECTION 4: VERSES 26-34

[26] Those who lived before them had devised their own stratagem; but God shook from its very foundations the edifice of their stratagem and brought it down on them; and so suddenly did the chastisement come upon them that they could hardly realise whence it came.

[27] On the Day of Resurrection also, will He humiliate them, and ask them: "Where are they whom you had set up as peers to Me, and for whose sake you used to wrangle (with the faithful?" They who hath even given the knowledge (of realities) will exclaim: "Shame and distress today for the unbelievers."

[28] They, whose lives the angels have taken away while they were wronging themselves

(by contending against God in favour of their gods) these will at this juncture proffer submission saying: "No evil have we done." (Those endowed with knowledge will then speak out): "Nay God knoweth what you have done:

[29] "Enter ye then the gates of Hell to remain therein for ever." How horrid the abode of the haughty!

[30] But when it will be asked of those who have been mindful of God: "What is it that your Lord hath assigned to you?" They will say: "That which is good." To those who do good, there is a good recompense in this world, and of a surety, one better still in the next, and how happy the final abode of those who are mindful of God—

[31] Perpetual gardens to live in, wherein flow streams and wherein they shall find all they desire! Thus doth God requite the righteous—

[32] They, whose lives the angels take away in their state of righteousness and whom they will say: "Peace be on you! Enter Paradise for what you have done."

The polytheists say, states the Qur'ān, that if polytheism was so repugnant to God, why is it that they are not forcibly prevented from taking to their gods. In reply to this, the Prophet is asked to say, that it was never the way of God to press all mankind to acknowledge Him, as the One God and conduct themselves in life in accordance with that belief. His way is to let His message of truth be delivered through His chosen prophets. In this way, every section of humanity has had a prophet to point out to them, that there is none worthy of worship except God, and that they who live aright prosper in life and that they who live wickedly suffer in life. The Qur'ān

makes it clear that man is endowed with the faculty of reason, and so it is for him to distinguish between what is good and what is bad. In fact he should be able to distinguish between the two, particularly when prophets have appeared among them to help them make the necessary distinction.

Despite the fact that every prophet had proclaimed that death was not the end of life but only an opening to new life, during which one will be called upon to account for the deeds, that one had done in one's present phase of one's life. But the Arabs at the time of the Prophet would not believe in any life to come. They were told that they would one day realise how perverse they were in holding such a view of life.

The Qur'ān points out that nothing is impossible for God. If anything is to be brought into being, He is only to will it and what is willed comes into its being. The Qur'ānic expression *kun fayakūn* or 'be and it is,' has been the subject of a good deal of futile dialectic disquisition. The Qur'ānic expression is plain enough that the very word *kun* has behind it a wish, a will, and that sufficeth. It at once sets in motion the creative power in God. That is the truth of life, which one should keep in view and not wrangle over it.

When persecution of the followers of the faith by the Quraish grew intense, the Prophet gave permission to them, to migrate from Mecca to some place of refuge. The first band of refugees sought asylum in Abyssinia and a subsequent batch in Yat͟hrib. Those who migrated to Abyssinia consisted of two batches, one composed of twelve men and four women, the second of seventy-three men and eighteen women. The leader of the first batch was Ut͟hmān bin 'Affān who later became the third caliph of Islam. The refugees referred to in verse 41 were those who had migrated to Abyssinia.

The Qur'ān holds out the prospect of these refugees, of having a goodly abode in this world and a much higher reward in the next. Abyssinia proved indeed a goodly home for them.

It may be recollected, that it was an army commander of the Abyssinians, who had once in the past made an attack on Mecca. But on this occasion the same people of Abyssinia came forward to give the refugees from Mecca a much needed shelter, and this because the refugees were men and women of high character and possessed qualities, which could endear them even to strangers. This migration not only ensured for the refugees security of life but opened the way for the spread of Islām in Abyssinia. So high an opinion of Islam did these refugees create in the minds of the Abyssinians, that their very king eventually came forward to embrace it. (Q. 6: 83). Such is the reward of those who endured the trials of life steadfastly. But the detractors of truth on whose account the followers of the Prophet had to flee their homes should remember, that they will have to face the result of what they had done. They should know that the Prophet was an inspired personality even as other prophets gone before. His primary function was to invite those around him to believe in the unity of God and the laws of life which are at work in life—the laws of life which should convince every reasonable person, that every object of creation as pointed out in verse 49, subserves a universal divine purpose and is controlled by One Supreme Being and that those, who conform to the laws of life set by Him prosper in life, and those who go against them inevitably suffer, both here and in the Hereafter. The Qur'ān, therefore, calls upon men to be truly devoted to God and look up to none else for any help in their hours of trial, and be steadfast in their devotion to Him in all situations, and be thankful to Him, for all the benefits he has conferred on them. Further, they should never attribute to God anything repugnant to His holy state, as did the Arab tribes *Khuzā'ah* and *Kanānah* for instance, by holding to the notion, that the angels were indeed daughters of God, and on that account regarded them as feminine deities.

[33] (O Prophet!) What is it that they
(unbelievers) await (to bring conviction
to them of the truth of thy mission)? Do they

want the angels to come to them
(to offer proof) or (will they be convinced
only) when the decree of thy Lord had gone
before them (and the inevitable overtook them).
God certainly was not unjust to them: in fact,
they were unjust to themselves.

[34] The evil which they had wrought
eventually recoiled on them (as a matter of course),
and what they had scoffed at (namely the
suffering to flow from evil living)
pressed them hard (in return).

SECTION 5: VERSES 35–40

[35] The polytheists say: "Had God pleased,
neither we nor our forebears would have
worshipped anyone but God; nor would we
have forbidden anything except under His
Command." Even so acted they who went before
them. Yet the duty of apostles is but
to convey (the truth) clearly.

[36] And to every people have We assuredly
sent an apostle enjoining: "Serve ye God
alone and keep away from *tāghūt* (or everything
evil)." Some of them, God hath guided, while
there were others who were decreed to err
(by their own persistence in error). So go about
in the land and see for yourself what was the
end of those, who had treated My apostles as liars.

[37] (O Prophet!) If thou art eager to give
them guidance, then note that God never guides
him whom He would let go astray. For such
as these, there shall be no helpers.

[38] And they swear by God most
emphatically: "God will never raise him who

once is dead." Nay, it is a promise binding on Him, although most men are not aware of it—

[39] And this, in order that what they have differed in might be made clear, and that the unbelievers realise that they had lied.

[40] When We intend a thing to happen, We issue the word 'Be' and it is.

SECTION 6 : VERSES 41–50

[41] As to those who, due to persecution, have to leave their homes for the sake of God, We will surely provide them with a goodly abode in this world; and greater is the reward in the next, if only they could realise it—

[42] They, who were steadfast (in the hour of trial) and had full faith in their Lord.

[43] And (O Prophet !) We have not sent men before thee (as prophets) except those inspired by Us. Let them ask (for corroboration) those who have the scriptures, if they know it not themselves.

[44] (We have sent them) with clear proofs (of their mission) and the scriptures. And to thee also have We sent a scripture (the Qur'ān) that thou mayst bring afresh to their minds what hath already been sent down to them ; so that they may reflect over it.

[45] Are they who have laid down their evil plans confident that God will not let them sink into the earth or that no chastisement will ever overtake them unawares,

[46] Or that He will not seize upon them when they are engrossed in their affairs—(at that hour) scarcely can they resist Him—

[47] Or that He will not seize
them with a slowly wasting scourge?
Indeed your Lord is Graciously Merciful!

[48] Have they not seen how the shadow
of everything, that He hath created
turneth about itself from right and from
left to bow before God in absolute humility?

[49] And to God boweth everything
that moveth in the heavens and
in the earth, and the angels too (bow),
and never feel too proud to do so.

[50] They fear their Lord, Who is above
them and do what they are bidden.

SECTION 7: VERSES 51-60

[51] God hath said: "Take ye not
to yourselves two gods—for, He is God
the One: Me, therefore, Me, ye fear."

[52] To Him belongeth all that is in
the heavens and the earth, and
to Him unceasingly devotion is due.
Will you then fear anyone other than God?

[53] And every blessing that ye
enjoy is assuredly from God alone:
Then, to Him alone do ye turn for help
whenever any trouble befalleth you.

[54] Thereafter when He relieveth
you of your trouble, strangely enough, some of
you set up peers for their Lord—

[55] To prove how ungrateful are
they for what We gave them!
Well! enjoy it: but it will not be long
before you shall know (what that means).

[56] And they present to those
(idols) of whose unreality you are not aware,
offerings out of what We have provided
them with for their sustenance. By God!
They shall be called to account for
the wrong use they have made of it.

[57] Mark! They look upon their
goddesses as the veritable daughters of God!
(How abominable the idea!). Transcendent
in purity is He! And for themselves
they would like to have what
they desire (namely, sons and not daughters)!

The Qur'ān now draws attention to a social evil which was widespread among the Arabs of the Prophet's time. The birth of a female child was looked upon by them as a source of disgrace to them. So acutely did some of them feel this sense of disgrace and sorrow, that they at times went to the length of burying the newly born female child alive. They were ready to assign daughters to God in the form of angels, but felt ashamed to own any for themselves. On the advent of Islam in Arabia, this repugnant social custom was abolished, by placing the womenfolk on an equal footing with men, both socially and spiritually.

[58] And when to anyone of them
the tidings of the birth of a daughter is conveyed,
dark shadows settle on his face
and he is filled with grief.

[59] He keepeth himself aloof because
of this ill tidings (and he begins to think
furiously whether) he shall keep it
as a sign of disgrace, or bury it in the earth.
Mark! How vile is their line of thought!

[60] May they who do not believe in
the Hereafter (and think that they will not

be called to account for burying
alive their daughters) be likened to whatever
is evil, whereas God (Who has fixed such
a Day of Reckoning) will have to be likened to
whatever is loftiest, for, indeed He is Mighty, Wise.

Drawing attention to the principle of respite implicit in human activity already dealt with in several places in the earlier chapters, the Qur'ān points out that the conduct of man can steady itself after he gets tired of its waywardness, only when he willingly accepts divine guidance as afforded to him through revelation.

SECTION 8: VERSES 61–65

[61] And if God were to punish
men for their inequities, He would not leave
on earth a living creature! But (as it is
His way), He giveth them a respite for an
appropriate term; and when that hour comes,
they shall not delay or advance it a moment.

[62] And what they loath to assign to
themselves, do they assign to God;
yet their tongues utter the lie that theirs
will be a happy end. But beyond a doubt
the Fire awaiteth them and
they shall be the first to reach it.

[63] By God! We sent apostles to
peoples gone before thee; but Satan made
their evil deeds seem fair to them,
He, (this very Satan), is their liege even today:
so a grievous chastisement awaiteth them!

[64] And We have not sent down
the Book to thee save that thou mightest
clear up to them what they wrangled about,
and offer it as a guidance and
a grace for those who believe.

[65] And God sendeth down water from
the heavens and by it reviveth the earth
after it hath been dead (and dried up).
Verily, in this lies a meaning for those who heed.

The following verses give a picture of some of the blessings of Providence bestowed on him. Even to a tiny creature such as a BEE does God afford to man what is of value to its health.

SECTION 9: VERSES 66-70

[66] Verily, even cattle can offer you food
for reflection! Out of what there is in their
bellies between dregs and blood, We
give you to drink pure milk —a
pleasant beverage for those that quaff it.

[67] And likewise from the fruit of the
palm and the vine, you get wine and healthful
nutriment. In this, verily, are signs
for those who understand.

[68] And thy Lord inspired the BEE:
"Provide thyself with places to dwell
in the mountains and in the trees and
in what men do build for thee:

[69] "Then feed thou out of every kind of
fruit and pursue assiduously the way of
living prescribed for thee by the Lord." From
its belly cometh forth a liquid of diverse
hues which serves as medicine for men.
Verily, herein also is a sign for those who reflect.

It is upto man to appreciate the blessings conferred on him, in diverse forms and conduct his life in a manner deserving of divine approval. He should endeavour to seek access to the means of subsistence and of comfort in life, and by way of thankfulness to God for the provisions so afforded, he should partake of them with those who have not had the opportunity, or the ability to possess them for themselves.

In verse 71 it is made clear that no one, who has received the means of sustenance in a larger measure than others should keep everything to himself. It will be an act of social injustice to do so. Every human being is entitled to have a share in the means of subsistence provided by God, and no one has a right to deny anyone his share in this provision of life. It is true that everyone should endeavour to earn his livelihood or to seek the means of subsistence. But everyone is not in a position to do so, particularly those, who are from their very childhood physically incapacitated to do anything, which may fetch them what they need in life. The same is true of those, who have grown old and have not the strength to work for their livelihood. People of this category need to be looked after by those, who are better situated in life or who can afford to partake of their earnings, with such of these helpless class of men and women. That is the moral duty, which the Qur'ān enjoins on every well-to-do member of the society. Verse 71 is thus one of the basic verses of the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān treats the surplus wealth of anyone as a trust of God, and calls upon the trustee to let the weak and the economically depressed to profit by it. The Qur'ān treats all mankind as but one single family, and calls upon all those, who are in a position to earn better than others, to pool together their resources in such a manner, that no one is left out unprovided, or denied his birthright of subsistence, from out of what God has provided in the earth, for the benefit of those who live thereon. In the Qur'ān earning is linked to spending. It is why the Qur'ān looks upon with distinct disfavour hoarding or accumulation of wealth in but a few hands (Q. 9 : 34). It is the duty of society to see, that the distribution of wealth among its members is equitable. Nothing is pure earning unless those, who are incapable of earning anything draw some benefit from it.

The blessings of Providence are again drawn attention to in the following verses.

[70] And God hath created you;
then will He (in His own time)
take you to Himself; and some of you will
He carry on to an enfeebled old age
when his memory of things once known does not
help him to recollect them. Truly,
God is Knowing, Powerful.

SECTION 10: VERSES 71–76

[71] And God hath granted the supplies of
life to some of you more than to others;
yet they to whom He hath so granted
give not out of it, to those whom their right hands
(dependants) possess. so that they may
severally profit by it. Do they then assert
that this bounty is not from God?

[72] And God hath given wives for
you from among yourselves, and
through them hath He given you sons and
grandsons, and supplied you with wholesome
food. Will they still believe in vain things and
turn ungrateful to God for favours shown them?

[73] And do they, instead of God,
worship those who neither can provide
them even a particle of food either from
the heavens or the earth, and
who have no power in themselves?

Verse 74 calls upon man not to coin similitudes for God, since God is too transcendent to be comprehended by the human intellect. However much one may tax his intellect and stretch his imagination to conceive in his mind any concept of God, it is bound to fall short of the reality. In fact the Qur'ān has elsewhere made it clear that "there is nothing like Him." The question arises if man cannot conceive any attribute for God,

Who is too transcendent for his comprehension, why then does the Qur'ān itself assign *ṣifāt* or attributes to God. To assign an attribute to God is to concede a personality to Him such as man can understand, and once this is done, the concept of a transcendent God ceases to bear any meaning or transcendence loses its high position and makes a descent. If transcendence means, that which is beyond the human comprehension, there is nothing left for man to give him an intelligible idea of God. At best it will be a negative approach leading to nothingness. It will not prompt positive devotion to God. Indeed, a negative approach will prove a trying handicap to any form of approach to God. One might feel an inward conviction of existence of a Supreme Being, but once he feels so convinced of His existence and finds corroboration, by what he observes both within himself and his external world, he is bound to feel that God has a personality possessing attributes of his own. He cannot easily visualise for himself any impersonal reality. Even if he could raise up such a vision before his mind, it will not function as a living force in him. Even his best effort in this direction cannot escape the temptation of assigning to God, some sort of a personality such as shall have a meaning for Him.

The question will arise why does the nature of man impel him to seek a. personal God. The fact is that man has an inward urge in him, to rise higher and higher in his human stature and reach a state of perfection; and this is not possible for him except by recognizing a Being, who possesses and enjoys an ideal perfection. It is this urge in him, which is responsible for the specifying of attributes to God; so much so that the process of negating attributes one by one by looking upon Him, as a Being beyond the beyond or beyond the human comprehension, he had necessarily for the sake of consolation or to define God in relation to himself, conceives for Him, attributes such as man can understand and appreciate. It is this psychological necessity that is responsible, for his resorting to a reverse process of reflection, or descension in thought to determine the place of

divinity in human life and of the universe at large, which he feels have not come into being of their own accord but by one, who has the power to create and give to each object therein a life peculiar to it. The adoption of a transcendental view of God had involved man in a process of ascension to a limit beyond, which his mind could not rise. It is at this stage when his mind had exhausted itself and could rise no further, that man thought it necessary to retrace his steps and assign to God a personality, which has a direct bearing on his own life. That is the process which we notice in the Vedantic philosophy of life. In the Buddhistic view of life, however, the process of negation is noticeable, but not the reverse process of affirmation. This has led to the scholars of the nineteenth century to entertain the view that Buddha did not believe in God. That was my own view of him in the past. However, in view of the recent researches in the field of his thought, I now think Buddha did believe in a Supreme Being or His essence, although he refrained from affirming anything of Him. The subject of divine attributes has been discussed at length in Volume I of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān.*

[74] Do not therefore set up comparison of God. Surely, God knoweth, but ye know not.

[75] God strikes a comparison between a slave, who hath no power over anything possessed of his master, and a free man whom We have given goodly supplies and who giveth out of them to others, both in secret and openly. Are they to be held equal? No, God be praised! But most men know this not.

[76] God setteth forth a further comparison—between two men. One is dumb (from his birth) and hath no power to comprehend anything and is a burden on his master, and always returns unsuccessful whenever sent on any errand. Shall he and the man who

enjoineth on others what is right and himself keepeth into the right path, be held equal?

SECTION 11 : VERSES 77-83

[77] To God alone is known all that is hidden in the heavens and in the earth, and (for Him) the bringing in of the Hour (for Judgement) will be but as the twinkling of an eye or even less. Surely, God hath power over all things.

[78] And it is God, Who has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers, when nothing could you know, and gave you hearing and sight and hearts, that haply ye might render thanks (to your Maker).

[79] Have they not looked up at the birds fitted (by nature) to fly in the sky above? None sustaineth them save God. Therein surely are signs for those, who have faith (in the power of God).

[80] And God hath given you dwellings to rest in: and He hath given you the skins of animals to make of them tents, light enough for you to carry on your journeys (and make use of) when you halt; and from their wool, soft fur and hair, hath He provided you with things of comfort to enjoy for a time.

[81] And from what God hath created, He hath provided shade for you, and given you places of shelter in the mountains, and garments such as may protect you from heat, and also equipment such as may help you in danger. Thus doth He fill up the measure

of His goodness towards you, that you may
devotedly resign yourselves (to Him).

[82] But (O Prophet!) if they still turn away,
thy function is but plain preaching.

[83] They know the benefaction of God
and yet they decline to appreciate it;
and many of them are ungrateful.

SECTION 12: VERSES 84–89

[84] And on the Day when We will call from
every people one, who shall bear witness (to
what the unbelievers had wrought in their
earthly life), the unbelievers shall not be given
leave (to offer excuses), nor shall they
have occasion to make amends.

[85] And when they who had acted wrongly
shall see chastisement facing them, it shall
not be made light to them, nor shall
they be granted any respite,

[86] When (on that Day), they who had
set up peers for God shall come face to face with
them, they will say: "Our Lord! These are
they whom we had called upon beside Thee."
But they will retort on them: "Surely you are liars."

In verses 87 and 88 the subject of divine providence is again drawn attention to a detailed exposition which has already been furnished in the commentary on 'Surat al-Fātiha' (volume I, pages 18–44).

[87] And on that they will offer submission
to God: and all the fantasies they had
indulged in will forsake them.

[88] To those who had declined to believe
(in God) and turned others aside from
the way of God, will We add chastisement
on chastisement for their mischievous activities.

Here the values of life, which the Qur'ān recommends to man for observance in life, both individually as well as collectively, are pointed out, together with the results which flow from a disregard of them.

> [89] And on the Day when We call from
> every people, one from among themselves
> to bear witness (to what they had wrought in their
> earthly life), We will cite thee a witness
> against these (who today are opposing thy
> mission): for, We have sent down to thee the
> Book which cleareth everything—a guidance
> and a mercy and glad tidings for those
> who resign themselves to God.

SECTION 13: VERSES 90-100

Commentators consider verse 90 as enunciating a basic principle to all those who have resigned themselves to God. The test for these persons lies in their actions, not in their beliefs. Fairness in dealing, kind behaviour (*'adl 'iḥsān*), charity towards the kindred, and avoidance of everything evil, and excesses are to be the distinctive features of their character. Pages 89–95 of *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, Vol. I, may be perused for a detailed discussion of *'adl*.

Verse 91 refers to the covenants and treaties entered into with God as witness. When solemn agreements are broken by individuals, which are rare among the civilised societies, the evil results are always confined to a small circle, but when these are flouted by parties and nations, they inevitably lead to human misery. We have before us the history of the eighteenth century imperialists in India, and that of the modern powers. It is unfortunate that every person, who is perfectly fair in his individual dealings, never behaves in a like manner as a citizen of his country and member of his nation in all political and social matters. This blind allegiance of an individual to the country or the nation at all costs, has brought the world to a verge of

crisis. As a matter of fact, some modern leaders who are never sincere to their promises are ranked among the greatest figures of the times. This type of dishonouring the promises and covenants was not uncommon among the polytheist Arabs. The believers are, therefore, asked to keep their word. Similar references have been made in verse 188 of chapter 2, and in verse 8 of chapter 23.

[90] Verily, God enjoineth fairness of
dealing and kindly behaviour (with others), and
the giving to kindred (out of what you have),
and forbiddeth lewdness and wrong-doing
and oppression. He giveth you
the advice that haply ye may take heed.

[91] And fulfil the engagements
undertaken with God as witness; and break
not the oaths pledged, when you
have cited God as a surety for you.
Verily, God knoweth all that you do.

[92] And be not like her, who tears
to pieces the string she had spun with much
labour, by making your oaths to be
means of deceit between you and others
(to whom you have pledged your word),
simply because you have an advantage over
them by being more numerous than they:
and He will on the Day of Resurrection, assuredly
clear up to you that touching
which you were at variance.

[93] Had God pleased, He could have
made you all one people. He causeth
whom He wills to go astray, and
whom He wills He guideth aright; and
you shall surely be called to account for what you do.

[94] Therefore, take not your oaths
to cheat each other, lest your foot
slip after it has been firmly set, and
you are called to pay for having turned
others aside from the way of God—
and severe will be your chastisement!

[95] And do not break the oath
taken in the name of God for the sake of
a petty gain; for, that which is with God
(the reward of straight dealing) is better gain
for you, if only you could understand it.

[96] All that is with you passeth away,
while what is with God abideth;
and to those who have steadfastly endured,
(the trials of life) will He surely give
a reward worthy of the best of their deeds.

[97] To whomsoever it be, male or female,
who believeth in God and doth what is
right, will We surely cause to give a good
life and a reward worthy of one's best deeds.

[98] And when thou wouldst read the Qur'ān
seek the protection of God from the accursed Satan.

[99] For, he hath truly no power over those
who believe and put their trust in their Lord.

[100] He (Satan) hath power only over
those who seek his friendship and under
whose influence they set up peers for God.

SECTION 14: VERSES 101-110

[101] When We substitute a directive for
another, and God knoweth best that which
He sendeth down, they say: "He is only a
manipulator of words." But many
of them do not understand.

[102] Say: "The Holy Spirit hath brought it down from thy Lord in its right form in order to strengthen the faith of those, who believe and as a guidance and glad tidings to the Muslims."

[103] And indeed We know that they say: "Without doubt a human being teacheth him." But the speech of the person they hint at is non-Arabic, while this is clearly in Arabic.

[104] Verily, those who believe not in the directions of God, God will not lead aright and for them there shall be a grievous chastisement.

[105] They only invent lies who do not believe in the revelations of God; it is they, in fact who are liars.

[106] Whoso denieth God after he has believed (in Him)—not he who hath denied Him under compulsion while in his heart he was firm in his faith, but he whose heart rejoiceth in his unbelief—on him will rest the displeasure of God and there shall be a very severe chastisement for him.

[107] This because they have chosen the life of this world in preference to the life to come. Verily, God guideth not those who do not believe in Him.

[108] Those are they whose hearts and ears and eyes God hath sealed; they are the ones who are heedless.

[109] In the next world they shall undoubtedly have to suffer.

[110] To those who, having suffered persecution, have left their homes and have, thereafter, striven (in the cause of God) and endured (all incidental trials)—verily, their Lord will in the end assuredly cover their weakness and be Gracious.

SECTION 15: VERSES 111–119

[111] On the Day when every soul shall plead for itself, it shall be paid according to what it had wrought; and none shall be dealt with unfairly.

[112] God setteth forth the example of a city enjoying perfect peace and security, to which had come means of sustenance in plenty from every side, but which was thankless to God despite these boons. In consequence doth God make it (or its people) taste hunger and fear for what it had wrought.

[113] And surely did an apostle from among themselves appear before them, but they treated him as an impostor. So chastisement overtook them for their evil doing.

[114] Eat then what is lawful and wholesome out of what God hath supplied, but give thanks for this bounty of God, if it is He Whom you really serve.

[115] He hath forbidden to you only carrion, blood, and swine's flesh, and what had been sacrificed in the name of anyone beside God; but if any be driven by hunger and not impelled by any desire or urge for transgression (has to partake of what is forbidden) then, verily, God is the Forgiving, the Merciful!

[116] And do not indifferently blurt
out with your tongue: "This is lawful
and that is forbidden," for that
will be foisting a lie on God. Surely, they
who so foist a lie on God shall not prosper.

[117] Brief their enjoyment but
sore their chastisement!

[118] To the Jews We have forbidden
that of which We have told thee before.
We have not injured them; they
have, in fact, injured themselves.

[119] To those who have committed
a wrong in ignorance, and have thereafter
repented and made amends, verily,
thy Lord will be right Gracious, the Merciful!

SECTION 16: VERSES 120-128

[120] Without doubt Abraham was
a model for others, obedient to God,
sound in faith, and he was not
one of those who set up peers (for God).

[121] Thankful was he for His bounties:
He selected him (for a high office)
and guided him into a straight path.

[122] And We bestowed on him that
which was good in this world: and
in the world to come shall
he be ranked with the righteous.

[123] It is why did We reveal to thee:
"Follow thou the faith of Abraham,
the sound in faith and he was not of
those who set up peers for God."

[124] The Sabbath was ordained
(to promote the sense of self-discipline among
them): but they wrangled over it.
Verily, thy Lord will decide between them on
the Day of Resurrection in regard
to what they had wrangled over.

The closing lines are addressed to the Prophet drawing his attention to the proprieties he has to observe, in the propagation of the divine Truth, always bearing with patience incidental discomforts.

[125] Invite people (O Prophet!) to the
way of thy Lord in a suitable manner,
and with tender exhortation and discuss things
with them in an agreeable style. Thy Lord
knoweth best who hath strayed from His path
and knoweth best who is guided aright.

[126] If you have to make reprisals,
then do it to the extent that you were injured;
but if you can endure (the wrong)
forbearingly, it will be an act of goodness
on the part of those who so endure!

[127] Endure then (O Prophet!) with
forbearance and it is only with God's
aid that thou canst endure forbearingly; and
be not grieved about them (the unbelievers)
and do not worry over their schemings.

[128] For, God is indeed with those who
avoid evil and with those who do good to others.

Part XV

Chapter XVII

THE ISRAELITES—BANI ISRA'IL

CHAPTER XVII

THE ISRAELITES—BANĪ ISRĀ'IL

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1–10

It was about a year before the Prophet's migration to Madina, that the journey by night from the house of prayer at Mecca, *al-masjid al-ḥarām*, to the house of prayer in Jerusalem, *al-masjid al-aqṣā*, referred to in the very first verse of this chapter. is stated to have happened and is commonly known as *mi'rāj*. The object of the journey is also given out in the same verse. It was to let the Prophet behold the signs of God or read into the meaning of things. The divine purpose underlying this arrangement was, to grant to the Prophet the highest of the revelations ever delivered to him and bring his knowledge of the divine to perfection, even as was done in the case of Moses during his retirement to the Mount of Ṭūr (Sinai) (Q. 7:143) and vouchsafed to him the *kitāb* or the Law (Q. 7:147).*

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] Glory be to Him Who conducted
His servant by night from the holy
mosque (of Mecca) to the distant mosque
(of Jerusalem), the precincts of which
We have hallowed, that We might show him
a few of Our Signs. Verily,
He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.

[2] And We gave the Book of Moses
to be a guidance to the Children of

* *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, Vol. II, pages 438–444.

Israel enjoining; "None shall
you take as guardian except Me,

[3] "O posterity of those whom
We alighted (in the boat) with Noah!
He truly was a grateful servant."

The *kitāb* or the Book mentioned in verse 4, refers to the Chronicles of Old Testament, especially of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which give an account of two huge calamities, which had befallen the Israelites during which even the holy Temple of Jerusalem was laid waste, once by the Babylonians when the Israelites were removed from their homeland, and the second time by the Romans under Titus. After the first catastrophe, the Israelites were afforded the chance to recover their lost position. This was due to their returning to the path of righteousness. But once they went back to their old evil ways, the law of requital overtook them in the form of the second catastrophe referred to above, namely, the Roman invasion of their land under Titus, from which they had no further chance of recovery, or a return to an organised prosperous life.

Verses 8 and 9 call upon the Israelites to reflect on what had happened to them in the past, and how much they had to pay for their iniquities. The hope is, however, held out to them, that if they should choose to return to the right path, they will surely have the chance to regain all that they had lost and secure for themselves an honourable place in the comity of nations. Now that the Qur'ān is there to show them again the path of righteous living, it is for them to yield to its advice and make amends and assure for themselves a rightful place in society. The Qur'ān asserts in verse 8, that every human action casts its shadow before it to receive in return the evil, or the good of it So it is a matter for them to decide, whether they should listen to the voice of the Qur'ān or pay no heed to it. Jesus Christ had, before the Qur'ān, called them to return to good living but they disregarded his call and suffered in consequence. It is now for the Qur'ān to repeat that very same call. The call is issued

and they will be judged by the choice they make. The law of return never alters for anyone. That is what the Qur'ān calls *Sunnat Allāh* or the Way of God.

[4] And We had made known in advance through the Book to the Children of Israel: "Twice will you cause disorder in the land and with deliberate arrogance indulge in high-handedness."

[5] On the first of the two occasions (forewarned), We sent against you Our servants possessing terrible prowess; and they entered the inmost part of your cities and the inevitable happened.*

[6] Thereafter did We grant you a further chance of mastery over them, and aided you with riches and male issues, and thereby strengthened your number.

[7] If (in that situation), you did any good, beneficial was it to your own selves; and if you did evil, harmful was it to your own selves. When the hour of reaction to your second lapse arrived, We (as before, raised up a people) to smirch your faces with shame, and to enter the Temple as they did the first time, and to destroy with utter destruction whatsoever fell under their power.**

[8] Haply will your Lord have mercy on you (if only you could make amends); but if you choose to return (to your evil ways), you shall, from Our side, have the (inevitable) reaction to it. And (bear in mind), We have made Hell to be a prison house for those who have discarded the right way.

* The army of Nebuchad Nezzar entered Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

** The army of Titus entered in 70 A.D.

[9] This Qur'ān verily guideth to the path, which is perfectly straight, and announceth to the believers who do what is right, that for them there is a great reward.

[10] And to those who believe not in the life-hereafter, for them there awaiteth a painful chastisement.

SECTION 2: VERSES 11–22

The path of life which that Law marks out to those, who adhere to it in sincerity to enjoy the benefits of life conferred on them by Providence, both here and in the Hereafter, is styled as *ṣirāt al-mustaqīm* or the straight path and also *al-dīn al-qayyim*, or the way of life, which establishes firmly in the land those who adhere to it sincerely, or gives to them a firm hold on life in all its spheres of activity.

Those who want to profit by life may be divided into two classes. One class consists of those, who aim to seek the good things of life, to assure for themselves material prosperity in this world. The other class consists of those, who aim not only to seek the means of material living provided by God, but to pursue this effort with an eye on the life they have to live in the Hereafter. This they do by placing their implicit trust in the goodness of God, and upholding sincerely in their lives the values of life enjoined on man, by means of revelation or the revealed truth delivered through the Prophet.

[11] Man (in his ignorance) coveteth what (in reality) is evil as (earnestly as) he prayeth for what is good; for, man is impetuous.

[12] We have made the night and the day as two signs (of Ours)—the sign of the night devoid of light and the sign of the day full of it, that you may seek out (the good things of life) by the grace of your Lord.

And that you may know how to reckon the years and keep account: and all things have We made distinctly clear.

[13] And every man's misdeeds have We fastened about his neck; and on the day of Resurrection will We bring out for him a record which he shall see spread open before him.

[14] (We shall then say:) "Read thy book. Thy own self should suffice thee to make out an account against thyself this day."

[15] Whosoever goeth the right way, doth so for his own good; and whosoever strayeth from the right path, doth so to his own hurt. None shall bear the burden of another except his own (or bear responsibility for another's actions); We do not chastise (any people) until We have sent an apostle (to warn them of the consequences which follow evil doing)

[16] And whenever We intend (in consequence of misdeeds, to let the law of life take its course) to destroy a city, We forewarn the affluent among its people; but when they disregard the warning, the doom deserved overtakes them; and We let it (the city) come to absolute ruin.

[17] And many were the generations since Noah, whom We let go to their destruction. And (O Prophet!) sufficiently informed is thy Lord of the sins of His servants, Observant as He is!

[18] Whosoever may desire to have of the (evil) things of this world which quickly pass away, that do We quickly let him have it, as We please, in this very world; and then We have kept ready Hell for him to enter, disgraced, outcast.

[19] But he who desireth the world
to come and striveth for it, in the manner
he should strive as a true believer
(in God) the striving of such
people will surely be appreciated.

[20] To all, whether of this variety or
that variety, do We provide out of
the provisions of thy Provider, for, to none
are denied the gifts of thy Lord!

[21] Mark! How (in this life) We have
favoured some above others; but, since the
grades in the life of the Hereafter are of higher
nature, higher are the forms of preferences.

Verses 22 to 43 draw attention to what is to observe in life and what is to avoid, if one cares to live a good life.

[22] Do not look up to anyone
beside God as worthy of worship,
lest thou stand condemned, forsaken.

SECTION 3: VERSES 23–30

[23] Thy Lord has ordained that
you serve none but Him and be good to parents,
and say not to them, "Fie," nor reproach
them when one or both of them
grow old during your life-time, but
speak to them respectfully.

[24] And defer to them in humility and
tenderness, and say: "Lord! have
compassion on them even as out of compassion
they reared me from my childhood."

[25] Your Lord well knoweth
what is in your minds whether or not
you are righteous. And forgiving indeed is
He to those who repent.

[26] And give to him who is of kin
his due (share in what you have),
and also to the poor and to the stranded;
but do not indulge in wilful extravagance.

[27] For, the wilfully extravagant
belong to the fraternity of satans; and Satan
was always ungrateful to his Lord.

[28] But if thou cannot offer them
anything in a situation, where thou
thyself art in need of seeking favours from
thy Lord which thou expecteth, then do
thou offer to them at least a word of sympathy.

[29] And let not thy hand so tightly
be tied up to thy neck (so that you deny
thyself the opportunity to help others); nor
let it be so wide open that nothing is
left with you to meet your own needs;
lest thou sit thee down rebuked, destitute.

[30] Verily, to whomsoever He pleaseth,
thy Lord giveth the means of sustenance
either in abundance or in moderation;
for He is well aware of (the condition) of
His servants, Observant as He is!

SECTION 4: VERSES 31–40

[31] And kill not your children for
fear of being reduced to poverty.
It is We, Who provideth both for them and for you.
Verily, the slaying of them is a grievous sin.

[32] And let not even the thought
come to you of fornication or adultery.
For, surely it is an indecent act
and a filthy behaviour.

[33] And do not take away the life of anyone which God holds sacred except for a just cause: and whosoever is slain wrongfully, to his heir, We have given the right of retaliation. But let him not in its exercise, outstep bounds. He who does so (or has not exceeded bounds) indeed achieved his object.

[34] And do not touch the property of the orphan (who is under your guardianship), unless it be to his benefit till he reaches the stage where he can look after himself; and fulfil your undertakings, for, every undertaking will have to be answered for (on the Day of Judgement).

[35] Whenever you measure out (a thing), measure it in full; and whenever you weigh (anything) weigh it with the balance held even. This is a fair dealing and will bring good results.

[36] Do not go after that of which thou hast no knowledge: Verily, the ear and the eye and the heart—every one of them shall have to answer for (in regard to the way it has functioned).

[37] And do not walk proudly on earth, for thou canst cleave the earth, nor shalt thou ever attain the stature of mountains.

[38] The evil that there is in everyone of these ways is odious to thy Lord.

[39] These are some of the precepts, full of wisdom, which thy Lord hath revealed to thee. So, let none set up

any peer for God to avoid being
cast into Hell, rebuked, forsaken.

[40] Is it conceivable that God should
exalt you (Meccans) by assigning to
you sons and make of angels daughters
for Himself? How awful it is to say such a thing!

SECTION 5: VERSES 41–52

[41] Mark, in how many ways have
We explained (what is good to them)
in this Qur'ān, so that they may reflect over it;
yet their aversion to it is ever on the increase.

[42] (O Prophet!) Say: "Were there
any gods besides God, as they affirm,
they would surely have in rivalry pushed their
way to the Lord of the Throne.

[43] Transcendent in purity is He—far above
what they say of Him, the Exalted, the Great!

In verse 44, the Qur'ān points out that everything in the universe of "the seven heavens and the earth," as it styles it, is so beautifully set that one and all proclaim in unison the wisdom and the glory of their Lord. One and all testify to the fact, that everything is intently engaged in the task assigned to it, under the divine scheme of things. In everything in the Qur'ānic sense, the term *shy'un* or thing referred to in the verse, applies not merely to the things of matter, but even to every aspect of human life and activity, there is a law of life at work appropriate to it. It was expected of man to understand these laws. The regret of the Qur'ān is, that it is only man that has failed very often to realise the purpose of His creation and neglected the laws of life, which were meant to help him fulfil his role in life. The Qur'ān adds that the Prophet is doing his best to convey to his people, the truths of life embedded in the revelation of the Qur'ān, and calls upon them to pay heed to them, if they cared

to live a happy life. The Prophet need not vex himself on account of those, who disdain to listen to the voice of the truth. His function is only to convey the warning; and now that he has delivered the warning in every earnest manner, he should let the law of life take its course. History will always repeat itself and those who mock at the Prophet, even as their forebears in the past generations had mocked at the prophets of their own times, they are bound to meet the consequences of their evil living.

The *ru'ya* or vision mentioned in verse 60 seems to have a reference to the journey from the House of Prayer of Mecca to the House of Prayer in Jerusalem, and what followed referred to in this chapter and the chapter 53 'Al-Najm' commonly known as *mi'rāj*, which afforded to the Prophet the opportunity to read into the meaning of things and appraise the realities of life at their proper worth. The cursed tree *shajrat al-mal'ūna* mentioned in the same verse is a figurative reference to the suffering in Hell awaiting the wicked. The verse states that the idea of this *mi'rāj* vision and the idea of suffering in Hell, were discredited by the unbelievers out of sheer spite for the Prophet, who called them to give up their old ways and return to the path of righteousness, if they cared to avoid the consequence of their evil living.

[44] Extol Him the seven heavens and
the earth and all who are therein;
there is nothing which doth not celebrate
His praise; only you do not understand their
praising. Verily, He is Forbearing, Forgiving.

[45] O Prophet! Whenever thou
recitest the Qur'ān We place an invisible
veil between thee and those,
who do not believe in the world to come;

[46] And We put over their minds
coverings lest they should understand it,

and in their ears a heaviness lest
they should hear aright (what is recited); and
when in the Qur'ān, thou takest the name
of only thy Lord, they quickly turn their backs
on you in aversion.

[47] Well! Know We what it is which they
wish to hear when they give ear to thee, and
what they whisper apart. (Well know We also)
when the wicked say (to the believers): "You
are but going after a man bewitched!"

[48] Mark! What likenesses they strike
out for thee! But they are in error and
cannot find the way.

[49] And they say: "After we are reduced
to bones and dust, shall we in reality be
raised up again as a new creation?"

[50] Say: "(It will be so), even if you were
turned to stone or iron or some other
substance which you may deem even harder."

[51] But they will then hasten to say: "Who
will bring us back to life," Say (O Prophet!):
"Even He Who created you the first time." They
will thereupon wag their heads at thee and
say: "When shall this be?" Say: "Belike it is near
at hand."

[52] The day that He will call you forth, you
will obey the call, praising Him; and you will
think that you had tarried but a little while.

SECTION 6 : VERSES 53–60

[53] And (O Prophet!), say to My (faithful)
servants to speak gently (to the unbelievers);

for Satan would stir up strife between
them and you, for Satan is man's avowed enemy.

[54] (Say:) "Your Lord well knoweth you:
He will have mercy on you if He please; or if He
please, He will chastise you." And We have
not sent thee (O Prophet) as a warden over them.

[55] Thy Lord hath full knowledge of everything
that there is in the heavens and in the earth.
And some prophets We have favoured above
others; and to David did We give the Psalms.

[56] (O Prophet!) Say to them: "Call those
whom you regard as gods beside Him, you
will find they have no power to relieve you from
distress or to alter it."

[57] They whom you call on, themselves
desire nearness to God, striving which of
them shall be nearer to him, hoping also of
His Mercy and fearing His Chastisement: truly,
the chastisement of thy Lord is to be feared.

[58] And there is no city (peopled by the
wicked) which We will not either destroy
before the day of Resurrection or chastise with
a grievous chastisement. This will be according
to the decree (of the law of requital) laid
down in the Book (or provided in His
scheme of things).

[59] And nothing hindreth Us from presenting
signs (visible proofs), were it not that the people
of old had discredited them. (For instance)
We presented to Thamūd a she-camel before
their very eyes; yet they maltreated her.
We do not send signs save as a warning.

[60] And call to mind the occasion when
We said to thee, "Verily thy Lord hath a
hold over all mankind: and the vision that
We showed thee was only to test men,
and likewise (the mention of) the tree accursed in
the Qur'ān. And this We do to inspire awe in them;
but it only increases enormously their impiety.

SECTION 7: VERSES 61–70

Verse 61 refers to the story of Satan's disobedience to the Command of God and points out that the attitude displayed by human beings against the verities of life is a satanic attitude. Only those who have withstood his temptations and taken to the right way, are to be regarded as truly righteous and are deserving of reward both here and in the Hereafter. The rest will receive what they have worked for.

[61] And remember also the occasion
when We said to the angels to bow
themselves before Adam: and
they bowed save Iblis. He said: "Shall I bow
before him whom Thou hast created of clay?"

[62] He added: "Look at him
whom Thou hast exalted above me.
If Thou wilt only respite me till the Day of
Resurrection, I will bring his posterity
under my authority save but a few."

[63] He (God) said: "Go ahead, but
whosoever of them shall follow thy lead,
Hell verily, shall be the recompense
for your (labour)—an ample recompense!

[64] "And you may entice by thy
speech such of them as thou canst; attack
them with thy horsemen and with
thy footmen (and with all thy might), and draw

to thyself some of their possessions and
their children and hold out to them
(alluring) promises." Mark! Satan can only
hold out to them promises which are alluring.

[65] "But thou shalt have no power
over My (faithful) servants; and
(for them) thy Lord sufficeth as Protector."

[66] (And turning to the faithful
the Qur'ān addresses): It is your Lord
Who speedeth the ships onward for
you in the sea, that you may seek of His Bounty;
for, surely He is Merciful towards you.

[67] And when any mishap befalleth
you on the sea, they whom you invoke
will not be there to aid you—save
Him alone: yet when He safely bringeth you to
the land, you turn away from
Him. Ungrateful is man!

[68] Are you then certain that He will not
cause a land-slide to fall over you or
that He will not strike you with a sandstorm;
then you shall have for you no protector.

[69] Or are you certain that He will not
take you back to it (sea) once more,
and then send against you a storm-blast and
drown you for your ungratefulness?
Then shall you find no helper against Us.

[70] And now have We given honour to
the children of Adam: by land and by sea do
We carry them: We provide food for
them of goodly things and have made
them to excel many of those whom We have created.

Verses 71 to 77 point out the trying circumstances in which the Prophet pursued his mission and the influences exerted on him to go slow. It was only his strength of mind infused in him by the divine Revelation that helped him to overcome all forms of obstacles placed in his way.

[71] On the Day when We will summon
all men with their leaders, they who
shall be given their record in their
right hand shall have to read it, and
they shall not be wronged in the slightest degree.

[72] And he who has been blind
here (to the realities of life), shall be blind
in the Hereafter and be off the track.

[73] Verily, they had well-nigh
beguiled thee from what We had revealed to thee,
and caused thee to substitute something
else in Our Name, and thus take thee for a friend.

[74] And had We not steadied thee
at the moment, thou hadst
well-nigh leaned a little towards them.

[75] In that case We would surely ave
caused thee taste a double remorse
in life and a double remorse at death: then
thou shouldst not have found a helper against Us.

[76] And truly they had left nothing
undone to make thee tired of the land,
in order that they might find it easy to drive
you out of it, and in that event they would have
lost little time to pursue you (still further).

[77] This was Our Way with the
apostles whom We had sent before thee,
and in this Our Way thou shalt find no change.

Drawing attention to the value of prayer in life and how it promotes spiritual salvation in him who sincerely turns to God in prayer, verses 78 to 111 proceed to deal with the delivery of the Qur'ān for the good of man, and the various questionings it raised among those to whom it was at first addressed at Mecca, and the answers furnished to them by the Prophet from time to time.

SECTION 9: VERSES 78–84

[78] Observe prayer between sunset
and the first darkening of the night
and recite the Qur'ān at day-break, for
the reading of it at day-break is specially noted.

[79] And for some part of the night
(O Prophet) keep awake—an added
occupation for thee; thy Lord will haply
raise thee to a praiseworthy station:

[80] And say, "O Lord, whatever the
situation I have to find myself in, or
have to come out of it, may it be in a
perfectly right manner; and grant me from
Thy Presence a power which (in every situation)
shall bear me up."

[81] And say: "Truth is come and falsehood
vanished. Verily, falsehood is a thing which
must vanish (eventually)."

[82] We sent down through the Qur'ān that
which healeth (thy ailments of the mind) and
is a mercy to the believers, but which only addeth
to the discomfiture of the wicked.

[83] And when we bestow favours on man,
he grows indifferent and turns away; but
when evil toucheth him, he falls into despair.

[84] Say: "Everyone goes the way he likes, but your Lord alone well knoweth who is going the right way."

SECTION 10: VERSES 85-93

[85] O Prophet! They will question thee concerning the Spirit. (The reference here is to the Holy Spirit and not to the soul of man. The *wahi* transmitted through the angel, Gabriel). Say: "The Spirit (proceedeth) at my Lord's Command: but of the knowledge (thereof), only a little is given to you."

[86] If We please We could undoubtedly hold it back (the spirit of *wahi*) which is sent down to thee; then none couldst thou find for thyself to undertake thy cause with Us,

[87] Except the Mercy of thy Lord. Great, verily, is His Favour towards thee.

[88] Say: Should men and jinn together attempt to produce the like of this Qur'ān they could not produce a like of it, however much the one group may help the other.

[89] And certainly We have emphasised (the truth) in this Qur'ān for the understanding of man in diverse ways, but most men have gone on doing nothing except denying it.

[90] And they say: "By no means will we believe in thee till thou cause a fountain to gush forth for us from the earth:

[91] "Or till thou have an orchard of date palms and grape-vine, and thou cause streams to flow profusely therein;

[92] "Or thou cause the heaven to fall on us in pieces, even as thou threateneth; or thou bring down before us God and the angels to vouch for thee;

[93] "Or thou have a mansion of gold built for thee, or ascend the heavens; and we will not believe in thy ascension until thou cause a book to descend on us which we can read." Say (to them): "Praise be to my Lord! Am I aught but a man and an apostle?"

SECTION 11: VERSES 94–100

[94] What hath hindered man from believing in a guidance whenever it hath come to them except the doubt which they have expressed, "Hath God sent a mere man as an apostle?"

[95] Say: "Were there angels on the earth (instead of human beings) going about freely, We would surely have sent them an angel-apostle from heaven."

96] Say: "God sufficeth for a witness between you and me." Surely, He knows full well and keepeth an eye on his servants.

[97] And he whom God guideth is indeed the rightly guided; and whom He lets go the wrong way shalt find none to assist except Him. And such will We gather on the day of Resurrection while they lie (prone) on their faces, blind, deaf and dumb. Their abode shall be Fire. So oft as it dieth down, We will rekindle it for them.

[98] This shall be their recompense for having declined to believe in Our Signs and for having declared, "When we are reduced to bones and dust, shall we be raised once more as a new creation ?"

[99] Cannot they perceive that God, Who created the heavens and the earth is able to create the like of them, and that He hath appointed for everything a term, of which no one should entertain any doubt about it ? Yet, the perverse persist in denial.

[100] Say : "Even if you hold all the wealth in different forms provided (on earth) by my Lord out of His Mercy, you would still refrain from partaking of it with others for fear of its diminution ; for, man is (by nature) covetous."

SECTION 12 : VERSES 101–111

[101] Of a surety We gave to Moses nine clear signs (the power to work nine miracles). Ask them, the Children of Israel, among whom he had appeared (to recollect why it was that) Pharaoh had said to him, "Verily, I deem thee, O Moses, a man given over to witchcraft."*

[102] Said he : "Thou knowest truly that none hath sent down these clear signs except the Lord of the heavens and the earth ; and I think, O Pharaoh, that thou art a person lost to reason "

[103] Then did he resolve to expel them (the Israelites) from the land ; but We caused him and all those who were with him to be drowned.

* Mawlana follows the usual rendering "of one enchai [illegible] ch cannot be the sense implied in the original...S.A L.

[104] And thereafter We said to the
Children of Israel, "Settle ye down in the land,
and on the final Day promised,
We will bring you up together."

[105] With truth have We sent it (the Qur'ān)
down indeed, with truth hath it descended,
and thee We have sent only as a
bearer of good tidings and warner.

[106] And We have divided the Qur'ān
into various sections that thou mightest
recite it to men with slow deliberation; and
(it is why) We have sent it down
(not all at once in its entirety but) piecemeal.

[107] Say: "Whether they (all) believe
in it or do not believe, those who are truly endowed
with the knowledge of what had been delivered
before (wherein the advent of the Prophet had
been foretold), will bow down in reverence
whenever it (the Qur'ān) is recited to them:

[108] "And exclaim, 'Exalted be our Lord!
Verily, the promise of our Lord is made good.'"

[109] And they bow down weeping, and
this deepeneth their sense of humility.

[110] Call Him (by the name of) *Allāh*
or (by the name of) *Raḥmān*, by
whichever (name) you like, all His Names are
excellent! Only do not shout out thy prayer,
nor say it in a very low tone, but seek a way between.

[111] And say: "Praise be to God Who hath
not begotten a son and Who hath no partner
in His Sovereignty, nor is He weak to need
a protector. Extol His Greatness in a manner
worthy of His Greatness."

Certain Specific Issues arising out of this Chapter call for Special Attention and are discussed below

The subject of Mi'rāj (Asrā or the night journey)

What is the significance of the night journey of the Prophet from the House of Prayer in Mecca to the House of Prayer in Jerusalem? Did this experience occur to him in a dream or while he was awake? Was it a spiritual experience or was it a mere physical journey? The companions of the Prophet and those who followed them, the *tāba'īn*, are divided in their views. The majority of them have thought that the experience was both spiritual and physical. But 'Āiysha, (the wife of the Prophet), Hadhifa bin Yamān, Hasan, the grandson of the Prophet, Mu'āvia, Ibn Ishāq and others, have related that this was wholly a spiritual affair of the Prophet. The fact is that the experiences of prophets and the working of their minds relate to a domain of life, which we cannot interpret in the light of our common experiences of life. Any experience which they experience is peculiar to them. It is beyond our comprehension.

Can we understand what exactly is prophethood or what *wahi* or revelation in reality is? Of course, a tradition of the Prophet has been recorded both by Bukhāri and Muslim, wherein the Prophet is stated to have said: "When the *wahi* or revelation comes, it gives the impression of a continuous knelling of a bell." The statement may at best be suggestive, for, clearly the *wahi* cannot take the place of a mere knell of a bell. The issue of the night journey is of a piece with the *wahi*. We cannot venture to take any definite view of it, since we cannot apprehend things of this nature. It is why there was so much of difference in the approach to it among the companions of the Prophet. Those of them who had denied or disbelieved its occurrence in a state of wakefulness, had probably felt, that it was not physically possible for anyone. On the other hand, those who believed that the event had occurred in a state of wakefulness, naturally

gave no credence to the view that it might have occurred in a dream. Of course, both the sides were sincere in the views they held. The very tradition, referred to above, records the Prophet's saying, "that this happened in a state, which he could neither call a state of wakefulness nor of sleep; it was a state between." Such a state is hardly possible for us to describe. The subject will be discussed further in our projected work *Al-Bayān*.*

The vision mentioned in verse 60, refers to the experience of the Prophet's night journey. The view is endorsed by 'Abdulla bin 'Abbās, Sa'id bin Jubair, Ḥasan, Masrūq, Qatāda, Mujāhid, 'Akrama, Ibn Juraij and others. Ḥafiz Ibn Kathir states that the consensus of opinion among the leading commentators of the Qur'ān is to the same effect. Therefore, the view held by certain commentators that the *vision* under consideration, has a reference to the vision relating to the conquest of Mecca cannot stand, since verse 1 of this chapter is a revelation delivered in the Meccan period of the prophetic mission, and the vision of the conquest of Mecca belongs to the closing years of the Medinite period. It is not, therefore, proper to subject the Qur'ānic revelation to any unwarranted disquisition. There were no doubt, a number of companions of the Prophet, who were of the view; that a vision could present itself before the human eye in a state of wakefulness. It is regretful that these companions of the Prophet did not take into consideration the view held of it by so eminent a companion of the Prophet, as 'Abdulla Ibn 'Abbās, who was convinced that this vision occurred to the Prophet in a state of wakefulness. He is definite, that this vision refers to the vision of the night journey which the Prophet beheld in his wakeful moments during a night. When the companion of the Prophet of this status is so definite about it, it was futile on the part of the other commentators to wrangle over it.

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* This projected work, unfortunately, was not executed during Mawlana's life-time...S.A. Latif.

'Abdulla bin 'Abbās is definite that it was a clear vision, which the Prophet beheld with his eyes open. In fact, the chapter entitled 'Al-Najm' or 'The Star,' which also deals with the subject has made it perfectly clear, that it was with his own eyes that the Prophet beheld, what he was allowed to behold. The passage runs :-

> The heart (of the Prophet) distrusted not what he beheld. Will ye, O people wrangle over what he beheld? For, indeed he beheld him yet again, near the lote-tree lying farthest, (beyond which none may pass), lying close to the Garden of Rest, when the lote-tree was being enveloped with (a mystery not disclosed). His sight did not blink nor did it miss anything Indeed he beheld clearly the greatest of the signs of the Lord.
>
> (Q 53: 11–18)

Indifference and despondency

Verse 83 draws attention to the weakness of man in two directions. Whenever he begins to enjoy a state of prosperity, he very often forgets his duty to God, and whenever he is reduced in circumstances, he falls into a state of despondency. In either situation, he courts disaster. It is only in moments of prosperity, that one should be keenly alive to the benefits of life, conferred on him by God and be thankful to Him by living a life of righteousness. To forget God in a state of prosperity is to abuse the privilege of prosperity conferred on him and to court the evil consequences thereof. Likewise, when any misfortune befalls him, it is upto him not to give way to despair, but to look up to God for aid. Not to do so is to prolong his agony. Man may have forgotten God in moments of prosperity and taken to a way of life, which means unhappiness to him. But even in such a depressed state, he should not despair of divine mercy. If he sincerely makes an effort to return to God or to the path of virtue, he may still hope to be rescued from his misery and be restored to a state free of worry. Even if he lives happily, he should neither forget God in moments of prosperity,

nor despair of His Grace when reduced to poverty and consequent distress. The principle holds good even in the spiritual life, as it does in the material. Those who make much of their so-called piety and look down upon those, who do not make show of it, court spiritual disaster, even as those who persist in sin. In either case a blissful or happy state in the life Hereafter is for those, who sincerely feel contrite of their shortcomings and seek forgiveness of God. It is only they, who earnestly try to make amends for their past and seek divine aid in living a better life, who really uplift themselves spiritually and qualify themselves for divine blessings, both here and in the Hereafter.

Commentary on "Every one acteth according to his own code of conduct"

The term *'alā shākilatihi* which occurs in the Arabic text of verse 84 is taken by some scholars to mean according to one's natural disposition. There are others among scholars, who take it to mean "according to one's way of life or code of conduct which one believes in." In our translation of this term, we have preferred the second interpretation, since it is warranted by the observation with which verse 84 closes: "But your Lord alone well knoweth who is going the right way."

Qul 'ir-Rūḥ min amri Rabbi

Tirmidhi Nisā'i and *Musnad* record that the Meccans who had heard of *rūḥ* spoken of freely by the Jews and Christians, asked of the Prophet "What is *rūḥ*?" In response to this, it was revealed: "*Qul 'ir-Ruḥ min amri Rabbi.*" In the old and new Testaments, the word *rūḥ* means angel. In the Qur'ān, the word is used to mean angel and also *waḥi* or revelation. The question is, "Does the word mean angel or the soul as it is generally called in English?" The early commentators are divided in their opinion. But the majority of them think that it means the *rūḥ* or soul in the human body and not angel. The Qur'ānic statement is terse. It meant, 'the command of God that is at work.' By observing this terseness, the Qur'ān seems to suggest that this is the utmost, that can be said of *rūḥ* and one should not

be overinquisitive about it; and this is emphasised by the closing words of this verse 85: "But of the knowledge (thereof), only a little is given to you."

Asking for miracles in justification of the Prophet's role as Messenger of God and the reply of the Qur'ān

Verses 89 to 96 deal with a subject which has been touched upon at several places in the Qur'ān. The Meccans used to ask of the Prophet to work miracles in proof of his assertion, that he was a Messenger of God. Their view was that a human being was not a proper agency, through which a divine message should be issued. It must be something higher than man. They could not believe that one like them, who eats even as they do, and roams about in the market place, would ever be called upon by God to function as His Messenger among men. Moreover, they expected that anyone, who claims to be a messenger of God should at least work miracles, or do something supernatural. The Qur'ān regrets that those, who had betrayed this attitude did not choose to seek truth for its sake or examine it as such. It observes in verse 89:

> And certainly We have emphasised (the truth) in this Qur'ān for the understanding of man in diverse ways, but most men have gone on doing nothing except denying it.

It calls upon the Prophet in verse 93 to announce to those who ask of him to perform miracles:

> Praise be to My Lord! Am I aught but a man and an apostle?

The nature of the Prophetic claim

The Qur'ān makes it clear that the Prophet was not sent to his people to work miracles in their midst or perform anything supernatural. His mission was to invite men to the path of right living. The programme placed before them was meant for the good of human beings, and naturally it could be brought

to their notice, only through the agency of man alone, who could follow it in his own person and offer himself as a pattern to others. It being so, the Meccans should not expect a messenger of God sent to men to be an angel. Certainly if the inhabitants of the earth were angels an angel would have been selected from among them, to function in their midst as a messenger of God. Says the Qur'ān here in verse 95:

> Were there angels on the earth (instead of human beings) going about freely, We would surely have sent them an angel-apostle from heaven.

This attitude of the Meccans was just to seek varying excuses to avoid facing the Truth. This is made clear in several places, for instance, in the following verse:

> And even if We were to send down to them angels and even if the dead speak to them, and We bring together all things face to face with them, they would not believe, unless Allāh so willeth it: but most of them are indifferent. (Q. 6: 111)

Divine Mercy and the Life Hereafter

Verse 100 draws attention to the vastness without limit of Divine Mercy. The significance of this life needs to be understood in proper perspective.

What is human life? The Qur'ān states that it is a manifestation of Divine Mercy. The Mercy of God desired emergence of a *being* well-formed and endowed with beauty and talent. It was why everything came into *being*. If the demand of Divine Mercy was to bring man into *being* and endow him with life, was it not also incumbent on His Mercy, that the life so granted to man should not be confined to the present but allowed to continue beyond it, so that the blessings of Divine Mercy might be enjoyed by it continuously? When Mercy is eternal, its blessings should also proceed from it without end. If this is so, there is no reason to believe that human

life will not enjoy the blessings of Divine Mercy without end, especially, when man is regarded as the best of creation.

What is the span of life lived by man in this world except a few days, which can be numbered? Does this mean that man's life stood to last just for a few days and terminated for ever? Could not the Mercy of God have extended the span of human life any further? For a fuller exposition of this theme one may refer to what has been said about it in pages 47–83 of the *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* Vol. I.

Unity in Being and Diversity in Names

Verse 110 points to a great truth of life and it is to be regretted, that proper attention has not been paid to it. A great many disputes between man and man. are due to the importance one attaches to the outward form of the term one employs rather than to the meaning of the term. Had one paid the requisite attention to the meaning of it, a good deal of disquisition over it could easily have been avoided.

The polytheists of Mecca were conversant with the word *Allah* as applied to the Supreme Deity, and were unaware of the fact that the Supreme Being was remembered by other names as well. The Qur'ān itself refers to God in His diverse attributes. In fact, the Qur'ān calls God by different names on the basis of His attributes, which one and all are beautiful in themselves and signify His Glory and Majesty So it desires to bring home to those, who had no other names for God except *Allah* or *Rahman* that His names are numerous and that by whatever name he is remembered, the reference is to one and the same Surpeme Being. In chapter 25 verse 60, we have a similar answer.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CAVE—AL-KAHF

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1-12

Truth is taken all over the world, to mean what is clearly straight, and without any flaw in its straightness. Whatever is crooked is not to be regarded as truth. It is why the path of goodness is styled by the Qur'ān as the 'straight path' and on that basis it claims, that there is nothing crooked in whatever it presents for the consideration of man. That is the point which the Qur'ān emphasises at the very beginning of this chapter. This done, it states that the object of the Qur'ānic revelation is, to announce tidings of good results following good deeds, and to hold out the warning that evil results will follow evil deeds. This chapter belongs to that phase of the Meccan period, when the persecution of the Prophet by the Meccans was at its height, and the Prophet had begun to grieve intensely over the continued indifference, shown by them towards the Message of truth delivered by him. The Qur'ān asks the Prophet, not to vex himself to death on their account. The law of life which brings happiness to those who indulge in evil living, will have its inevitable course.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] Praise be to God, Who has sent the Book
to His servant with nothing irregular allowed
to get into it.

[2] All is straightforward, that it may warn
(the unbelievers) of a grievous chastisement
from Him, and announce to the believers who do

the things that are aright, the glad tidings that a goodly reward (abode) awaiteth them,

[3] Wherein they shall abide for ever.

[4] And to admonish those who say, "God has begotten a son."

[5] No knowledge of this have they nor their fathers had. It is an odious saying that cometh out of their mouths! They simply utter a lie.

[6] And if they believe not in this declaration, (it does not follow that) thou shouldst vex thyself to death by going after them.

[7] Verily, We have made all that is on earth to be an ornament for it, in order that We might see who among them excel others in conduct.

[8] And (at the same time note that) it is We who would surely turn everything thereon into a barren waste.

The passage beginning with verse 9 gives an account of the dwellers of the cave. It will be commented on in the last note attached to this chapter.

The story goes that a band of God-fearing young men who, disgusted with the wickedness of their people and with the persecution they were subjected to for their right living, had sought refuge in a cave. Their story as circulated among the Arabs and the people of the Book had reached the Prophet in a garbled form, and as it had a significance of its own to him and to everyone also at a time, when the Prophet and his own devoted band of followers were being persecuted remorselessly, the actual account of the dwellers of the cave was revealed to the Prophet in order that a proper lesson might be drawn from it by everyone concerned. The Qur'ānic account runs:

[9] Dost thou think that of Our Signs, the inmates of the CAVE and of *al-raqīm* are the only wondrous?

[10] When a few youths betook them to the cave, they said: "O Lord, grant us mercy from Thy Presence and direct aright our affairs."

[11] We, therefore, caused them to live by themselves in the cave for many a year, with little (from the outer world) reaching their ears (as if in a state of sleep).

[12] Then We brought them into view once again, that We might know which of the two groups (one inside the cave and the other in the outer world), could best reckon the space of time they had passed therein.

SECTION 2 : VERSES 13–17

[13] (O Prophet!) We wilt correctly relate to thee their story. They were youths who believed in their Lord and whom We had afforded guidance in good measure.

[14] And We strengthened their hearts, when they stood up and said: "Our Lord—the Lord of the heavens and the earth—we will never invoke anyone beside Him, for in that case we would have committed an outrage.

[15] "Our people have taken unto themselves others beside Him as their gods (as appointed by Himself to intercede for them); though they cannot bring any clear proof in their support. Who then is more wicked than he who foisteth a lie on God?"

[16] (Said they among themselves):
"And now when you have separated yourselves from
them and from what they worship beside God,
shelter yourselves in the cave; your
Lord will bestow on you His Mercy and
will regulate your affairs in
a manner agreeable to you."

[17] One might have seen (from outside
the cave) the sun on its rise veering
away to the right of their cave, and
at its setting keep to the left (thus preventing
the rays of the sun penetrating the cave),
while they lay in its spacious chamber.
That was one of the signs of God.
He whom God guideth, he indeed is
the rightly guided, and he to whom He lets go
astray, none shall find for him a friend to guide.

SECTION 3: VERSES 18–22

[18] And one mightest deem them
awake, whereas, they were asleep and
We were turning them now to the right and
now to the left, while their dog
with paws outstretched lay at the entrance.
Hadst anyone come suddenly upon them, he
wouldst surely have turned back on them
in flight, filled with fear.

[19] And in this situation did
We awake them that they might question
one another: "How long have you tarried here?"
Some said: "We have tarried a day or a part
of a day." Some others said: "Your Lord knoweth
best how long you have tarried. Now send one
of you with this coin of yours into the city
and let him see who therein hath the best victuals.
and let him bring you thereof something to eat;

and let him be courteous and give no occasion
to know anything about you (or of your
presence here).

[20] "For, if they find you out, they will
stone you or compel you to return to their
faith and in that case never will it be well with you."

[21] But even in this way did We disclose
their identity to them (the people of the city)
that they might learn, that God's
promise always holds good, and that there
could be no doubt of the coming of
the Hour (of Judgement). When they began
disputing among themselves as to
what was to be done to them, some said:
"Raise a tomb over them, their Lord
knowest best about them." Those
who prevailed in the matter, said: "Nay,
we will raise a temple over them."

[22] O Prophet! Some will say: "They
were three, their dog the fourth."
Others will say, "Five, their dog the sixth,"
hazarding a guess at the unknown,
while some others will say, "Seven, and
their dog the eight." Say, (O Prophet)
"My Lord knoweth best their number;
none except a few, shall know it. Avoid
discussing their affairs seriously; you may talk
of them only in a cursory manner; and
question not anyone among them (your disputants)
concerning them (the inmates of the cave)"

SECTION 4: VERSES 23-31

[23] Never say in any matter:
"I will surely do it tomorrow."

[24] Without (adding), "If God will,"
and whenever thou art uncertain about
anything in your mind, call thy Lord
to mind and say: "May the Lord guide me
to be clear about it in my mind."

[25] And (some say) they tarried in
their cave three hundred years and
(others) add nine years over.

[26] Say (O Prophet): "God best knoweth
how long they tarried: He alone knoweth
the secrets of the heavens and the earth."
Look thou to Him alone (for knowledge), and
harken unto Him (alone). They
(mankind) have no protector beside Him,
nor doth He share His Sovereignty with any.

Verses 27 to 59 draw attention to the nature and significance of deeds both good and evil. The theme, as verse 54 points out, has been repeated over and over again, just to emphasise its importance to human life.

[27] And (O Prophet!) recite whatever
hath been revealed to thee of the Book
of thy Lord. None shall change His Words;
and thou shalt have no refuge beside
Him (even if you ever think of doing so).

[28] And stand fast by those who call upon
their Lord at morn and even, seeking
His Approbation: and let not thine eyes be
turned away from them, with a view to
gaining the adornments of the life of this world;
and yield not to the bidding of him,
whose heart We have made neglectful of
the remembrance of Us, and who followeth
his own lusts and whose ways are unbridled.

[29] And say: "The truth is from your Lord: let him therefore who will, believe; and let him, who will not, refuse to believe. We have verily, kept ready for the wicked a Fire, the smoke of which shall hem them in; and when they cry for help, they shall be helped with water, like molten metal, which shall scald their faces. How wretched the drink, and what an unhappy place to lie in!

[30] As for those who believe and do the things that are right—verily, We will not suffer the reward of him, who has done what is right, to be wasted.

[31] For such, are provided gardens to abide in, wherein flow streams. Decked shall they be therein, with bracelets of gold, and green robes of silk, thin and thick, shall they wear: they will recline therein on thrones. How excellent the reward, and how pleasant the resting place!

SECTION 5: VERSES 32–44

[32] And set forth for them, as a parable, the case of two men—of one for whom We provided two gardens of grape-vines, and hedged them round with date-palms, and between the two We provided corn fields.

[33] Both the gardens yielded their fruit, and never did they stint aught thereof; and We caused a stream to flow between the two.

[34] And he who had plenty of fruit said to his friend, in the course of a conversation, "I am wealthier than thee and have a larger following."

[35] And he entered his garden in a state of mind hurtful to himself. He said: "I do not think this (garden) will ever perish.

[36] "And I do not think that the Hour will come; and even if I be taken back to my Lord, I shall surely find one better than this to return to."

[37] His fellow companion said to him while conversing with him: "Dost thou deny Him Who created thee of clay, then of a life-germ and then gave thee the full form of man?

[38] "But as for me, God alone is my Lord and I do not set up any peer for my Lord.

[39] "And why didst thou not say when entering thy garden, 'As God willeth!' All power lieth in God. Thou seest that I have less of wealth than thee and fewer children

[40] "Yet haply my Lord may grant me a better garden than thine, on which He may send His bolts from the sky, turning it into a barren piece of land,

[41] "Or sinking its water deep into the earth making it impossible for you to use it."

[42] And his fruits were completely destroyed. He then began to wring his hands at what he had spent on it (garden), seeing that it lay levelled to the ground, and he said: "Oh that I had not set up any peer for my Lord?"

[43] And he had none to help him except God; indeed he was not even able to help himself.

[44] In such a case succour can come only from the true God. He alone giveth a good reward and He alone furnisheth a good recompense.

SECTION 6: VERSES 45–49

[45] And set forth for them a similitude from the life of this world. It is this: We send down water from the sky, and up riseth a luxurious herbage on earth: but soon it becometh dry stubble, which the winds scatter. And God hath power over everything.

[46] Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world, but the good deeds which abide are better in the sight of thy Lord and hold out hopes (of a good reward).

[47] And (beware) the day when We shall make the mountains pass away, and thou shalt see the earth a levelled plain and We shall gather all together, and shall not leave out anyone of them,

[48] And they shall be presented before thy Lord in row (and asked): "Now have you come before Us created even as before: but you had not thought that We had fixed such a day for you."

[49] And the record (of each) shall be presented, when thou shalt see the sinful in fear of that which is therein; and they shall say, "Woe to us! What a correct record is this! It leaveth nothing, small or great, unnoted, and they shall find all that they had wrought, brought to view. And thy Lord will not deal unjustly with anyone.

SECTION 7: VERSES 50–53

[50] And call to mind the occasion when We said to the angels: "Bow down yourselves to Adam," and they all bowed down except Iblis, who was of the jinn and who disobeyed the Command of his Lord. Will you then take him and his offspring as friends instead of Me (particularly when you know) that they are your enemies? What a substitute have the unthinking lot taken for themselves!

[51] I did not invite them to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor the creation of themselves; nor take these seducers as my helpers.

[52] And on the day when He will say: "Call upon those whom you had presumed to be My partners (in power)," they will accordingly call upon them but they will not answer them, for, We will have set up a partition between them.

[53] And the guilty shall see the Fire and fear that they may be cast into it, and they shall find no way o escape from it.

SECTION 8: VERSES 54–59

[54] In this Qur'ān We have employed diverse forms of illustrations (to bring home its truths) to man, but this man, in most cases, has proved contentious.

[55] Now that true guidance hath come to men, what hindreth them from believing in and seeking the forgiveness of their Lord? Do they want a doom such as what overtook the ancients for their deserved chastisement to stare them in the face?

[56] And We have never sent apostles except to convey the tidings (of a good return for whatever good one does) and the warning (of painful results following evil deeds), but the unbelievers indulge in vain words to refute the truth: and they treat with scorn My Signs and the warnings they imply.

[57] Who can be more unjust than him, who when reminded of the admonitions of his Lord, disregardeth them and forgetteth what (evil) his hands have already wrought? We have caused veils to be drawn over their own minds, lest they should understand any (right) thing, and a heaviness in their ears; and even if thou bid them to the right way, they will never agree to be guided.

[58] Thy Lord is Gracious, full of Compassion! Were He to call them to account for what they had done, He would certainly hasten the chastisement they deserved. But there is a time appointed for them (to make amends), beyond which they will find no further respite,

[59] (As in the case of) those cities which We caused to be destroyed for their iniquities, only after giving them due warning of their (coming) destruction.

SECTION 9: VERSES 60–70

Verses 60 to 82 deal with an incident in the life of Moses which has a relevance to the aspect of the subject touched upon in the previous passage.

[60] Call to mind the occasion when Moses said to his servant: "I will not stop until I reach the place where the two seas meet, or I will journey on for years."

[61] But when they reached their confluence, the thought of the fish (they had with them) was out of their mind, with the result that it (the fish) slipped out into the sea as if through a tunnel.

[62] But when the two proceeded further, said he (Moses) to his servant: "Bring us our morning meal; for now we feel tired after this journey."

[63] (The servant said), "Do you know what has happened? When we rested near the rock, then I had forgotten to take care of the fish and it was none but Satan who had made me forget about it, and it has taken it away to the sea. This is rather wondrous!"

[64] (Said Moses): "This is what we had looked for," and they both retraced their footsteps.

[65] Then they found one of Our Servants on whom We had conferred a special favour from Our Presence, and whom We have instructed in a particular line of knowledge from Us.

[66] Moses said to him: "May I follow thee that thou mayest teach me for my guidance of that knowledge which thou hast been taught."

[67] He said: "Aye! But thou canst not bear with me.

[68] "How can thou bear with me in matters which thou canst not comprehend."

[69] He said: "Thou shalt find me
patient if God pleased; and I shall
not disobey thee in anything."

[70] He said: "Then if thou wilt
follow me, question me not touching
anything until I explain it to thee myself."

SECTION 10: VERSES 71-82

[71] So they both walked together
till they embarked in a boat when
he (the companion of Moses) made a hole in it.
He (Moses) said, "Hast thou broken a hole
in it that thou mayst drown its occupants.
A grievous thing thou hast done."

[72] He (the companion of Moses) said: "Did
I not tell thee that thou couldst not bear with me?"

[73] He said: "Chide me not for
my forgetfulness and why be harsh
for a thing which was beyond me."

[74] (Having come out of the boat),
went they on till they met a youth,
and him he (the companion) slew. Said (Moses):
"Hast thou slain a person who is not guilty
of man-slaughter? Thou hast
indeed done an odious thing?"

PART XVI

Chapter XVIII

THE CAVE—AL-KAHF

(Contd.)

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CAVE—AL-KAHF

SECTION 10 *(Contd.)*

[75] He (the companion) said: "Did I not tell thee that thou couldst not bear with me."

[76] He (Moses) said: "If after this
I question thee concerning anything,
then keep me no longer in thy company.
I shall then have no excuse to offer you."

[77] Then they went on till they came to
the people of a city. Of this people
they sought something to eat; but they
(the people) declined to entertain
them as guests. They found therein a wall
which was about to fall and he (the companion)
set it up right. He (Moses) said: "Hadst thou
wished, thou wouldst have obtained wages for this."

[78] He (the companion) said: "Thou
and I are now to part. I shall now tell thee
what all thou wert so impatient to understand.

[79] "As to the boat, it belonged to
poor men who toiled on the sea,
and I was minded to damage it for the reason
that there was a king pursuing them who was in
the habit of seizing every (good) boat by force.

[80] "And as to the youth, his parents
were both believers (in God), and
I feared that he might distress
them by his insolence and disbelief.

[81] "And I expected that their Lord
would grant them in his place one better
than he in virtue and in love with them.

[82] "And as to the wall, it belonged to
two orphan lads in the city and underneath it
lay a treasure, which belonged to them,
and their deceased father was a righteous man,
and thy Lord desired that the two
should reach the age of maturity, and
take out through the Mercy of thy Lord; and
not of mine own will did I do this.
This is the explanation of what
thou couldst not bear with patience."

Some of the people of Mecca having heard a good deal from the people of the Book—the Jews and the Christians—about Dhul Qarnain had asked of the Prophet what was the truth about him. Verses 83 to 101 form an answer to the question.

SECTION 11 : VERSES 83–101

[83] O Prophet! they will ask thee of
Dhul-Qarnain, (the two-horned one). Say:
"I will relate to thee an account of him."

[84] We established his power in the earth,
and allowed him access to everything.

[85] And he set out on a course (for this),

[86] Till he reached the horizon where
he found the sun setting in murky water,
and hard by, he found a people. We said:
"O Dhul-Qarnain! Chastise
them or treat them with kindness."

[87] Said he: "Him who is impious,
will we surely chastise. Then will
he be taken back to his Lord, Who will
chastise him with a grievous chastisement.

[88] "But as for him who believes in God and does that which is right, he shall have a generous recompense and we will make the life easy for him by our command."

[89] Then he (Dhul-Qarnain) followed a different route (to the east),

[90] Towards the rising sun till he came upon a people for whom We provided no shelter against it.

[91] (He left them) in that state. And We had full knowledge of all that he had with him.

[92] Then he (Dhul-Qarnain) followed yet another route,

[93] And when he arrived between two mountains, he found there a people, who could not readily understand anything said to them.

[94] They said: "O Dhul-Qarnain! Gog and Magog commit havoc in the land. May we pay thee tribute so that thou build a rampart between us and them?"

[95] He said: "Better (than your tribute) is the power (to do good to others) wherewith my Lord hath equipped me. Only help me with labour, and I will set up a barrier between you and them.

[96] "Bring me blocks of iron." When the space between the two mountain sides was filled, he said: "Ply your bellows;" and when he had made it (the iron) red-hot, he said "Bring me molten brass that I may pour over it."

[97] They (Gog and Magog) were not thereafter able to scale it, nor were they able to burrow through it.

[98] He (Dhul-Qarnain) said: "This (barrier) is a mercy from Lord. But when the promise of my Lord is to be fulfilled, He will wipe it out; for the word of my Lord always holds good."

[99] On that day, We will let them fall one over another (like billows); and the trumpet shall be sounded, and We will gather them all together in a body.

[100] And We will set Hell on that day just in front of the unbelievers,

[101] Whose eyes had failed to notice My warning and whose ears had disdained to listen to it.

Verses 102 to 110 are addressed to those who have defied the call of the Prophet. He is assured that all their efforts to thwart him will eventually fail and that his call is certain to prevail.

SECTION 12: VERSES 102–110

[102] Do the unbelievers think that they can achieve anything by taking mere creatures of Mine for friends beside Me? Verily, We have kept Hell ready for the unbelievers to enter.

[103] Say: "Shall We tell you who have let their deeds go utterly to waste?

[104] "They are those who have pursued their present life in the mistaken belief that what they are doing is right."

[105] It is they who have disregarded the signs of their Lord and refused to believe that they shall ever meet Him. Gone to waste, therefore, are their works; and

no weight will We attach to them
on the day of Resurrection.

[106] Their recompense shall be Hell.
This because they have refused to believe in
and treated My Signs and My Apostles with scorn.

[107] But as for those who have believed
and done the things that are right,
they shall have the gardens of Paradise to enter.

[108] Therein shall they dwell for
ever: they shall wish no change therefrom.

[109] (O Prophet!) Say: "Even were
the sea to become ink wherewith to write
the words of my Lord, and a like of
it is added thereto, the sea will exhaust itself,
while the words of my Lord continue to issue forth."

[110] Say: "Verily, I am but a man
like you. (The only difference is that)
It has been revealed to me that your god
is God the One; let him then who
hopeth to meet his Lord do that which is right:
and do not let anyone (beside God)
share his devotion to his Lord.

Comments on issues which the chapter has raised

Ashab-i-Kahf

In the early centuries of Christianity, a number of earnest Christians, disgusted with the unkind treatment meted out to them, by the non-Christian population around them, had sought refuge in secluded corners of the world, and lived the life of hermits; so much so that, a good many of them continued to dwell in several places of refuge till their very death. It was only long after they had passed away, that their skeletons came

to the notice of those who happened to visit these places. In fact, discoveries were made in the vicinity of Antioch and Ephesus in Asia Minor.*

The question arises as to where the event narrated in this chapter did actually happen. The Qur'ān refers to the place of happening as *Kahf* and also as *Al-Raqīm*. The second generation of the early Muslims, the *tābe'īn* regarded *Raqīm* as the name of a town. Since no one knew any town bearing this name, a good many of the early commentators of the Qur'ān took the word for what it meant etymologically. *Al-Raqīm* literally means what is written or inscribed. Some of the commentators thought, that the word *al-Raqīm* was used probably because there was some tablet put up at the entrance of the cave under reference, giving some sort of an account of those who had dwelt therein. It was thus that *aṣḥāb al-Kahf* came to be styled as the people of the Inscription, *aṣḥāb al-Raqīm*.

Al-Raqīm

If the early commentators had only consulted the *Torah*, they would have found that the word *raqīm* mentioned in this chapter is the same as the word *rāqīm* mentioned in the *Torah*. *Rāqīm* was the original name of a town, which was subsequently called Petra or as Arabs pronounced it Betra.

The archæological research conducted after the first World War has brought to light, the existence during the second century of the Christian era of a town bearing the name of Petra, which as further research has discovered, had in its earlier history borne the name of *Rāqīm*. The name of Petra was given to it after the conquest of Egypt and Palestine by the Romans, when the town of *Rāqīm* had developed into a large centre of population studded with numerous Christian churches and Roman theatres. The town was situated on an upland lying to

* Mawlana Azad uses the traditional Urdu word *Rum* which stands for the Eastern Roman Empire. Antioch is now in Syria.—Ed.

the north of the Sinai peninsula. When the Arabs conquered this territory in the sixth century A.D. it was known as the town of Petra, which the Arabs pronounced as Betra. It may be noted that at the time few there were, who knew it by its earlier name of *Rāqīm*.

Close to this town, it has been found that there lay a series of spacious lengthy caves. In the vicinity of one of these caves, excavation has uncovered the ruins of ancient structures, one of which probably was a place of worship.

Since this ruined town associated with the dwellers of the cave, once bore the name of *Rāqīm*, it was an idle venture on the part of the early commentators of the Qur'ān, to give to the word *Rāqīm*, as occurring in the chapter, the sense of a tablet or an inscription. As pointed out above, the word *Raqīm* should be taken to mean the town *Rāqīm*, later called by the Romans as Petra and pronounced by the Arabs as Betra, a town peopled by the tribe of Nabites.

The story of the dwellers of the cave was already known in a hazy form to the Meccan Arabs, through the long commercial intercourse between the Nabites and the Arabs. The real significance of story could not however be realised by them till the Qur'ān revived their memories and called upon them to draw a lesson from its story.

THE ACTUAL STORY

Verse 9 clearly points out that the story of the dwellers of the cave was regarded as a wonderful event; so much so that, there were people who asked of the Prophet what really it was. Revelation then disclosed the fact as summed up in verses 10 to 12. It has already been pointed out that in the early days of Christianity, several young men who had ardently believed in the message of Christianity had sought refuge in a cave, from the persecution of those of their people, who were opposed to the teachings of Christ. These young men, thus cut off from their people, lived for years in their place of refuge. The Qur'ān

suggests that each of the two groups—one dwelling in the cave and the other of those who lived in the town, one devoted to the life of purity, and the other group living in the city pursuing their own way of wickedness—reaped what they had sown. The wicked lot in the town were eventually superseded by those, who believed in the path of righteousness and turned Christians. It was at this state, the dwellers of the cave came into contact once again with those living in the town. So unknown were the dwellers of the cave to the townsmen, that their re-entry into social relations with them seemed as if they had been resurrected.

But despite their coming back into limelight again, those who had sought refuge in this cave continued to live their own self-imposed life of asceticism. The cave was spacious enough for their living and although direct rays of the sun could not penetrate it, it was so formed that air could pass through it freely. The cave dwellers had a dog for their companion. The way in which they had staunchly adhered to the faith, drew admiration from the people of the town, with the result that the cave became a place of pilgrimage for them. Indeed they contemplated to build a temple close to the cave.

In what manner did the dwellers of the cave spend their time during their stay there? In this regard, the Qur'ān mentions: "with little (from outer world) reaching their ears." The sense is that they were in a state, in which they could have no news of what was going on outside the cave or in the outer world. But the commentators assert that it is a figurative expression meaning 'lost in sleep.'

The fact is that the story of the dwellers of the cave as originally narrated was to the effect, that the dwellers of the cave did fall into a prolonged sleep; and this gained currency. The first narrators of the story were the Nabites of Sinai. In this context the expression of the Qur'ān, "We brought them into view once again," should mean that, 'they woke up.' Physiologically,

as has been admitted by medical science, a prolonged sleep for an indefinite time is possible in certain cases. But the Qur'ān does not specifically suggest this. It is therefore risky to make a categorical assertion in this respect.

Verse 18

Verse 18 has been commented upon in a fantastic manner. It runs:

> [18] And one mightest deem them awake, whereas, they were asleep and We were turning them now to the right and now to the left, while their dog with paws outstretched lay at the entrance. Hadst anyone come suddenly upon them, he wouldst surely have turned back on them in flight, filled with fear.

The early commentators of the Qur'ān were not fully aware of the fact, that the story relates to the life of the Christians of the first century of the Christian era, when due to persecution by those, who were opposed to the message of Christ had turned ascetic and taken refuge in places of security, such as caves. As already indicated, the dwellers of the cave under reference, had permanently cut themselves off from human society dwelling in towns and had in the end died therein, with the result that their corpses lay in the state in which they had expired. Some of these corpses might have been noticed as lying on their backs, or on their sides, and some of them lying with the eyes open, even as they were lying when they passed away. Some of those who passed by these caves might have taken them to be still alive. But there was no reason as to why the early commentators of the Qur'ān, should also have made a like observation and bodied forth from their imagination, the variety of states for the dwellers of the cave, whose story is narrated in the Qur'ān. They should have known that the Qur'ān by referring to their story, simply draws a picture of the earliest band of Christians, who had resolved to bear adversity on trials heroically in the cause of Truth. That

is the lesson which the Qur'ān aims to draw attention to, for the benefit of the followers of the Prophet of Islam. To read anything beyond into this story is clearly unwarranted. At best the story gives the picture of the origin of monastic practice in Christianity, which may be viewed in its fullness in the accounts of it given in the following standard works.

(1) *The Paradise or Garden of the Holy Fathers*, by E.A.W. Budge.

(2) *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, by H. Workman.

(3) *Five Centuries of Religion*, by G.B. Coulton.

(4) *The Medieval Mind*, by H.O. Taylor.

The Person Moses Met

In verse 65 of the chapter it is stated that Moses met a person whom God had offered knowledge from Himself. Who was this person? The Qur'ān does not name him. But there is a tradition recorded in *Bukhāri* and *Muslim* on the authority of Sa'īd bin Jubair that the name of the person was Khiḍr. The early commentators of the Qur'ān have quoted a variety of traditions in support of this statement, but the traditions employed are mostly weak and are largely drawn upon the legendary lore of the Israelites.

Dhul-Qarnain

The third story narrated in this chapter is that of Dhul-Qarnain. The commentators of the Qur'ān are all of the opinion that the question touching this story was raised by the Jews. It is, however, likely that it was raised by the pagans of Mecca, where this chapter was delivered. The story of Dhul-Qarnain as narrated in this chapter raises certain issues for consideration :

(1) The person of whom an account was sought was already known among the Jews as Dhul-Qarnain.

(2) It appears that the person known under this title was a prosperous and powerful ruler of some country.

(3) This ruler had to his credit several conquests, one to the west of his country, another to the east of it. The third direction in which he had extended his dominion was a valley, from one end of which there were frequent depredations into it, by two tribes known as Yājūj and Mājūj or Gog and Magog.

(4) It was in this valley that this ruler had constructed a huge partition wall to obstruct the passage of Gog and Magog into this valley.

(5) This D͟hul-Qarnain was a just king. When he proceeded on his conquests towards the west, he came to a territory whose people had entertained a dread of him. They felt that he would prove a scourge to them. But he was prompt in issuing a proclamation, that he would be kind and considerate to the innocent and the law-abiding, and would be strict to those who were oppressive to the weak among them. (Verse 85)

(6) He was a God-fearing man and truth-loving, and believed in the life-Hereafter. (Verses 87 and 98)

(7) He was not avaricious or self-indulgent. When the people of the valley which was subject to the depredations of Gog and Magog entrusted him, to construct a parapet wall for them to ward off the invasions of Gog and Magog and promised to pay an annual tribute to him in return, he said that he would meet with their wishes, just for the sake of doing good to them, with no thought of any return from them.

Who was it then, of the kings of ancient times who possessed all these virtues, except he who had borne the title of D͟hul-Qarnain?

The Waywardness of Commentators

The first thing which the commentators of the Qur'ān had to determine was the meaning of the term Dhul-Qarnain. The word *qarn* means a horn both in Arabic and Hebrew. Dhul-Qarnain therefore was taken to mean the 'two-horned.' Since there was however no king bearing this description, the commentators of the Qur'ān went on giving to the word *qarn* a variety of strange meanings. Since they could not agree on any single meaning of it, they found it easy to hit upon Alexander of Macedonia to bear this title, since among the ancients, he was regarded as the mightiest of conquerors. Imām Fakhruddīn Rāzī was the foremost among those commentators to style Alexander as Dhul-Qarnain, although the term could not strictly be applied to him, since he was neither God-fearing, nor just. Neither was he magnanimous towards the conquered people nor did he ever raise any protecting wall for them.

The fact is that our commentators have not succeeded in finding out who exactly it was who bore this title Dhūl-Qarnain.

Daniel's Dream

If there is at all any clue to the significance of the term Dhūl-Qarnain, it can be traced, though vaguely, to a dream by Prophet Daniel during the days of his imprisonment in Babylon.

The Babylonian period of Israelite history was a period of their extreme helplessness. Their identity as a community had been shattered, and their very Temple at Jerusalem dismantled, and their towns lay in ruins. It was at this stage in their history that Daniel was raised as a prophet among them. By sheer dint of merit, he gained a place of honour at the court of the king of Babylon. It was at this time, as stated in the *Torah* that he dreamt a dream.

> And I saw in a vision ;......I was by the river of Ulai.... and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which

had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand: but he did according to his will, and became great. (Isaiah 8:2-4).

And as I was considering, a he-goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. And he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing before the river, and ran unto him in the fury of his power;...and there was no power in the ram to stand before him. (8:5-7).

And I heard a man's voice between the bank of Ulai which called and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision...And he said, "Behold, I will make thee know...The ram which thou seest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia, and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king." (8:16-22).

From the account of this vision and its interpretation given by Gabriel, the vision is meant to convey that the two horns were the kingdoms of Media and Persia, and that they would combine under a single king. The dream of Daniel was also interpreted as tidings of good news to the Israelites, that they would be soon restored to prosperity, and that this was to be effected by the king of Persia, who would resettle them in Palestine and give a new life to them.

So it happened in the time of Cyrus. It was during his time that the twin kingdoms of Persia and Media combined to constitute a single state under his kingship. It was during his time that Babylon was annexed to his state. Since in the interpretation of Daniel's dream, Media and Persia were regarded

as two horns of the ram, and Cyrus became the king of both kingdoms, the Jews probably styled him as the two-horned, out of admiration for him. This is just a guess. But a research carried on in 1838 brought to light the fact that this term of Dhūl-Qarnain or the two-horned, was not a title coined by the Jews for the king of Persia and Media. It was actually the title by which the people of the two kingdoms hailed Cyrus; so much so that, it was by this title that he was known during his life-time. This research put an end to all speculations on this subject.

The question now arises, whether the idea of the two-horned took its rise in the dream of Daniel, or was it the result of an independent thinking of Cyrus or his people. At all events, it is now an established fact, that it was this Cyrus or Khusro or Kaikhusro as is known in Arab history that was the Dhūl-Qarnain referred to in the Qur'ān.

If we look into the accounts of the life of Cyrus given by Greek historians, the picture of his character, which rises before one's mind is on all fours with the picture of him furnished by the Qur'ān.

According to the *Torah*, the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus marks the beginning of a new life to the Israelites, as was prophesied by Isaiah one hundred and sixty years in advance of the event and by Jeremiah sixty years before it actually happened. Cyrus had much regard for the Jewish Prophet Daniel, so much so that, soon after his conquest of Babylon, he allowed the Israelites to return to their homeland. Not only this, he proclaimed throughout his dominion, that God had inspired him to rebuild the Temple of Solomon at Jerusalem. In fact he restored to the Temple all the golden ornaments, which Nebuchad Nezzar had brought from Jerusalem after the sack of the Temple and kept in the treasury of Babylon. Cyrus died in 529 B.C. or ten years after the fall of Babylon and bore a great name for all the good qualities he possessed.

Prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah

Before we look into the details of the account given of Cyrus in the Qur'ān, it may be worth-while to have a view of the prophecies made in respect of him by Israelite prophets. The first of the prophecies to be noted is that of Isaiah. He it was who anticipated the sack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, and also of its restoration to its early sanctity. In this connection, Isaiah makes mention of Khorus of Persia, known to the Greeks as Cyrus, and refers to him as the shepherd of the Lord and states that he would be called upon to deliver the Israelite prophet from the oppression of Babylonians. He is also addressed as the Messiah of God.

Even as Isaiah, Prophet Jeremiah made a similar prophecy about the fall of Babylon, where the Israelites were kept as prisoners for seventy years :

> Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard ; publish, and conceal not : say Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces. For out of the north there cometh up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein. (Jeremiah 50 : 2–3)

Jeremiah had also prophesied that the Israelites would be kept in imprisonment, for seventy years in Babylon and that thereafter, they would be restored to Jerusalem.

> For thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word towards you, in causing you to return to this place. (Jeremiah 29 : 10)

The Historic Value of these Prophecies

When Cyrus entered Babylon, Prophet Daniel pointed out to him, that this conquest of his had already been prophesied

by an earlier prophet, Isaiah. Then, Cyrus was so much impressed by this information, that he resolved to reconstruct the Temple of Jerusalem. The present day critics do not give credence to these prophecies. But the Jewish literature is clear on the point that the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus was indeed prophesied by their prophets, and that Cyrus was chosen by God to be the instrument of their restoration to their homeland, and that he was a deliverer of the oppressed from the tyrannical yoke of the Babylonians.

The Qur'ānic Description of Cyrus

The description of Dhul-Qarnain given by the Qur'ān fits into the description of Khorus or Cyrus furnished by the *Torah*. In fact, there is evidence in the *hadīth* also to the effect that the Prophet of Islam identified Khorus of the *Torah* with Dhul-Qarnain of the Qur'ān. The qualities of mind and heart which the Qur'ān attributes to him, and the picture of him, as a mighty conqueror and a just ruler are all endorsed by the early Greek historians, Herodotus, Ctesies and Xenophon, and the modern Prof. G.B. Grundy of Oxford University.

The *Torah* styles Khorus or Cyrus as a 'Messiah of God' and the 'shepherd of God.' Be it remembered that the Israelites were always averse to giving such a high station in life to any non-Israelite. Still the two titles given to Cyrus by the *Torah* are there to mark out, that his character was so exceptional, that it could not but command the admiration and respect of people so exclusive in their outlook on life as the Israelites.

Religion of Cyrus

The question naturally arises, what was the religion which Cyrus followed? History has recorded that he was a contemporary of Zoroaster and a supporter of his faith. He is not only the rejuvenator of the Persian Empire but a rejuvenator of the old Magian faith as sponsored by Zarathushtra or Zoroaster.

A good deal of controversy was raised in the nineteenth century in respect of Zoroaster. In fact, a school of thought denied the very existence in history of such a personality. But it is now established beyond doubt that he was the propounder of a faith. Speculations prevailed not only in regard to the times, during which he preached his faith but also in regard to the place of his birth, and the part of Asia where he pursued his mission. But the research done by Geldner has established the fact, that it was in Azerbaijan or the north-western part of Iran, that he propounded his faith, and that he died some time between 583 and 550 B.C. The fact is also established, that it was about 550 B.C. that Cyrus ascended the throne of Persia, and professed not only the faith of Zoroaster but was a great supporter of it. He died in 529 B.C.

The Faith of Zoroaster

The Qur'ān states that Dhul-Qarnain or Cyrus believed in the unity of God and the life-Hereafter, and was also one inspired by God. It being so, how is the fact of history that Cyrus was a follower of the faith of Zoroaster to be explained? The only explanation that may be advanced is, that the faith of Zoroaster was the same as that attributed to Dhul-Qarnain in the Qur'ān. In fact a careful examination of the teachings of Zoroaster makes it clear, that he was a believer in God, and in the need for righteous action for man, and that the association of fire-worship with his name is a later development, which manifested itself in the wake of a revival of the early Magian beliefs. Just as the religion of Christ received its pagan touch in Rome, even so the faith of Zoroaster received the touch of Magism during the days of the Sassanian kings of Persia.

The Ancient Faith of the Medes

Before the advent of Zoroaster, the beliefs entertained by the Medes, were similar to those entertained among the Indo-European races, who all belonged to the Aryan stock. Even as in North India, the Aryans who had settled down in Iran

worshipped at first the manifestations of Nature. They then developed the institution of sun-worship, leading eventually to the worship of fire. Among the Aryans of Greece, the concept of the worship of certain deities came into vogue—deities who could deal out both good and evil to human beings. The Aryans in Iran slowly came to believe also in deities, bnt they divided the deities into two categories, one representing the forces of goodness, the other consisting of the forces of evil inimical to man. The former represented *light* and the latter *darkness*. According to this early Iranian concept there was a conflict between *light* and *darkness* and they turned to *light* which originated from the sun and appeared in the fire produced on the earth. It may be pointed out here that the concept of the *good* in the ideology of the early Iranians, had absolutely no spiritual aspect about it. It only connoted the material good or material comfort, which life offered to man. The concept of spiritual living and of moral distinction between *good* and *evil* had not as yet taken its rise among them.

Fire-worship gradually grew into an established institution run by a special class of priesthood known as Magush, which in Arabic was pronounced as *majūs*. It was this title of the priests that gave to the system of fire-worship its name of Magism.

Zoroaster declined to believe in Magism. He came forward to propagate a right belief in God and in the life-Hereafter, and called upon his people to live righteously. He said that the deities of good or evil had absolutely no existence and emphasised that there was only One Being, Ahura Mazda, who governed the life of everything. He alone was the Light, the Holy, the True, the Wise, the Mighty and the Creator of everything in the universe. He said that there was none like Him. He said that the forces of good, which they worshipped as deities were but the creation of this Supreme Being, and what they called evil, was nothing but the force of evil at work in life or Ahriman.

Zoroaster laid the greatest stress on righteous living. He did not detach morality from religion, as the Greeks had done.

In fact, with him moral living was religion itself. He never regarded religion as exclusive to any nation or country. He laid the primary stress on the purity of mind and on rightness of action. And everything was to be judged by this standard. Balance in thought, balance in speech, and balance in action, were the basic principles of his faith. As Prof. Grundy observes, his religion was based on truth and action. His was not a religion of ritual, as was the case with the religion of the Greeks. He divested religion of every form of symbolic representation. He thought that one should not pray to God out of fear or dread of Him but one should do so only to seek His blessings. He laid equal stress on the important of the life-Hereafter. He believed that, even as in the present, we have to live a life in the Hereafter. The deeds of man done in the present will be finally judged in the next. He believed in the immortality of the soul. He said that the body perishes, but the soul survives and enters upon a phase of life as warranted by the deeds he had wrought in this life.

Those who have studied the history of Zoroastrianism seriously have come to the conclusion, that this religion of Zoroaster has played a very great part in the development of moral thought in the world; so much so that they have recorded, that within a short time it had succeeded in the fifth century B.C. in giving a high moral tone to its followers, as was hardly noticeable in the life of that period either in Greece or Rome. This verdict was recorded by Herodotus and Xenophon, the historians not of any country friendly to Iran but of Greece, which was repeatedly at war with it. In Prof. Grundy's opinion, the life of the early followers of Zoroaster in Iran, was marked by their adherence to truth and honesty to an extent hardly reached in those days by any other people. What deep impression this religion of Zoroaster had created on the life of the Iranians, who came after him can still be noted in the inscriptions of the time of Darius I, during whose reign Zoroastrianism had reached its high watermark. Be it noted that Darius was a

contemporary of Cyrus and ascended the throne of Iran eight years after his death.

It was in fourth century B.C. that the decline of Zoroastrianism began. This was due partly to the revival of the old Magism and partly also due to the impact thereon of foreign influences. Indeed, when Alexander swept across Iran, a great tragedy overtook Zoroastrianism. Even as the original text of the *Torah* had been burnt by Nebuchad Nezzar, even so the original copy of *Zend Avesta* was destroyed by Alexander. It was only five centuries thereafter the Sassanians came into power, that Ardsher Babkani had a copy of the *Avesta* prepared afresh, even as Ezra had compiled afresh the *Torah*, after the Israelite return to Palestine from Babylon. But by this time the original teachings of Zoroaster had undergone serious mutilation, with the result, that the new version of *Avesta* prepared in the time of the Sassanians, was an amalgam cf Magism, Zoroastrianism and the cult of Greece, the entire fabric of it bearing the overall stamp of Magism. I am thankful to the French orientalist, Anquetil for having made available to me a copy of this mutilated text as had reached India through our Parsee friends. But it is a portion only of the original text of Zoroaster.

It may be observed that, however much the original teachings of Zoroaster were mutilated in the course of history, it is certain, that image-worship in any form did not venture to find a place in the religious system of the followers of Zoroaster.

Was Dhul-Qarnain a Prophet?

From the references in the Qur'ān and the *Torah* it is clear that Dhul-Qarnain or Cyrus was a prophet of God.

Gog and Magog

References in the Qur'ān to Gog and Magog have been made in two chapters—one in this, and the other in the chapter 'The Prophets.' It has already been pointed out that they were two warlike nomadic tribes of Mongolia, who in both ancient

times and in the medieval period of history, emerged out of their homeland, and ran across vast territories of Western Asia, and wrought great havoc among their peoples and disturbed the course of civilisation.

CHAPTER XIX

MARY—MARYAM

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1: VERSES 1–15

This is the first of the chapters of the Qur'ān wherein the account of the advent of Jesus Christ is given in some detail. The aim is to dispel all erroneous notions, which had prevailed in respect of this sacred personality, both among the Jews and the Christians. All the synoptists agree that John the Baptist (Yaḥyā or Yuhanah) was the precursor of Jesus in the line of prophethood. For instance, St. Luke first refers to the birth of John the Baptist, and then of Christ. The Qur'ānic account endorses this. The account in St. Luke runs:

> There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughter of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elizabeth was barren, and they both were now well-stricken in years. (1 : 5–7)
>
> And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. (1 : 8–10)
>
> And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And

> when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. (1: 11–13)

> And Zacharias said unto the angel, whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife well-stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb and not able to speak until the day that these things shall be performed because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. (1: 18–20)

The Qur'ān does not endorse the Biblical statement that Zacharias "shalt be dumb and not able to speak." The statement is probably warranted by the fact that among the early Israelites, one had to keep silent while observing a religious fast. When John was born to Zacharias, his life from the very beginning was marked by piety. His youth was spent in a wilderness. It was there that, "The word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; as it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying: The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Luke 3: 2–4)

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] Kāf Hā Yā 'Aīn Ṣād.

[2] (This is) a record of the goodness of thy Lord (shown) to His servant Zachariah,

[3] As he called upon his Lord in a low submissive tone,

[4] Saying, "Lord! Verily, my bones have grown weak, and the hair of my head have become markedly grey with age and never hath my prayer to thee, Lord, gone in vain.

[5] "Now have I fears about (the behaviour) of my kindred after me and my wife is barren.

[6] "Give me then an heir as Thy special gift, such as shall be heir not only to me, but to the family of Jacob and let his life be pleasing to thee."

[7] (Then it was announced to him): "O Zachariah! We verily give the glad tidings of a son, who shall be named Yaḥyā (John): that name We have not bestowed on anyone before."

[8] He said: "Lord! how shall there be a son to me when my wife is barren, and when I have reached the final stage of old age?"

[9] He said: "Even so! Thy Lord saith, 'Easy is this for Me.' (For, dost thou know that) I created thee and thou wast nothing."

[10] He said: "O My Lord! Vouchsafe to me some token of this (gracious assurance.)" He said: "It is this: for three nights, though sound in health, thou shalt not speak to anyone."

[11] Thereupon he came from the sanctuary to his people, and made signs to them to sing praises of (their Lord) morning and evening.

[12] (When Yaḥyā was born and he was still a child) We said: "O Yaḥyā! hold fast to (the commandments of) the Book; and We bestowed on him wisdom while yet a child,

[13] And tenderness (of heart) from Us, and purity (of mind), and God-fearing was he,

[14] And duteous to his parents, and was never overbearing or unruly in conduct.

[15] Blessed the day he was born, and blessed the day he will die and blessed the day he shall be raised to life.

SECTION 2: VERSES 16–40

Six months after John started his mission of preaching, it is stated in St. Luke that:

> And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. (1 : 26–32)

In verse 16 of this chapter 'a place to the east' means Nazareth, which lies to the north-east of Jerusalem and to which place Mary repaired after she had left the temple in Jerusalem, where she had stayed before.

[16] And (O Prophet!) make mention in the Book of the affair of Mary (which happened) when she retired from her family to a place towards east.

[17] And put on a veil (to hide herself) from them: and We sent to her Our Spirit (Gabriel)

and he appeared before her in a full-fledged
form of man.

[18] She (Mary) said: "If thou be truly
righteous, (begone from me); in the
name of the God of Mercy, I fly for refuge
from thee (to Him)."

[19] He said: "I am only one sent by thy
Lord, that I may bestow on thee a boy pure in
every respect."

[20] She said: "How shall I have a boy for
me when no man hath ever touched me and
I have never been unchaste?"

In verse 21, the Qur'ān hails Christ as a sign (of God) to humanity, and a mercy to them. The expression, brief as it is, sums up all the noble qualities with which his personality was invested by God.

[21]. He said: "Even so shall it be. Thy Lord
saith: "This is easy for Me that We may
present him to mankind as a symbol of (Our Power)
and of Our Graciousness. And it is a thing decreed."

[22] And she conceived the boy to be, and
she retired with him (the boy concerned)
to a far-off place.

[23] And the pangs of childbirth betook her
to the side of a palm tree. She said: "Oh,
would that I had died ere this had been a thing
utterly forgotten!"

[24] Then one (an angel) cried to her from
below her: "Grieve not thou; thy Lord
hath provided a streamlet below thee close by,

[25] "And shake the trunk of the palm
tree toward thee: it will drop on thee
dates, ripe (and) fresh.

In verse 26, the reference is to the Jewish practice of keeping silent during their fasting hours. In verse 28, Mary is addressed by her detractors as the sister of Aaron, who was an extremely pious man and well-reputed for his upright living. The expression was meant to be a taunt, suggesting that one related to so pious a man, should not have come out with a child in her lap born, as Mary's detractors thought, out of wedlock—(*Muslim* and *Tirmidhi*).

[26] "Eat and drink then and be of good cheer; and shouldst thou see any human being say: (indicate by gestures) I have vowed to the Merciful to observe fast for the day; to no one I will speak this day."

[27] Then did she come to her people carrying the baby with her, who said: "O Mary! Thou hast brought an amazing thing!"

[28] "O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a wicked man nor was thy mother an unchaste woman."

[29] Thereupon, she made sign towards him (the babe suggesting that they should speak to him rather than to her). They said: "How shall we speak with one who is in cradle, a mere infant?"

[30] The babe said: "Verily, I am the servant of God; He hath given me the Book, and hath made me a prophet,"

[31] "And He hath made me blessed wherever I may be, and enjoined on me regular prayer, and alms-giving as long as I live;

[32] "And to be duteous to my mother: and He hath not made me to be overbearing or depraved."

The passage leading up to verse 33 describes the essential message of Christ. The chapter now turns to observe, that for whatever has been added to or taken out of it, Christ is not responsible. For instance, the Qur'ān definitely declares, that the doctrine of Christ being the son of God, is a clear invention on the part of his followers.

For this doctrine, St. Paul is essentially responsible. He took for granted that man was born in sin as the result of the original sin imputed to Adam and Eve. So it is argued that this sin ingrained in the nature of man should be expiated for. How was this to be done, was the problem before him. The easiest way was to let God, as an expression of His Mercy, incarnate Himself in the form of a son to Himself, and then let that son expiate for the original sin through a process of crucification. The Qur'ān discredits this assumption by declaring, that God was in no need of such a device to bring salvation to His own creation (namely mankind), and calls upon those concerned to reflect over the consquences which flow from such a doctrine.

[33] "And blessed the day I was born!
and the day I shall die, and the day
I shall be raised to life!"

[34] This is Jesus son of Mary; this is a
statement of truth concerning which they
have wrangled.

[35] It beseemeth not God that He should
take unto Himself a son. Transcendent in
purity is He! When He intendeth a thing to
be, He only saith: "Be" and it is.

[36] And (what Jesus had uttered was
just this): "Verily, God is my Lord and your
Lord; so serve Him alone. This is
the straight way."

In verses 37 and 38, attention has been drawn to the day of judgement, when they are to realise the error they have fallen into. In the very next line, verse 39, a warning is held out of a day coming— a day of Despair. And what was this day? The commentators of the Qur'ān take it to mean the same day of Judgement as referred to in verse 37, but because wherever the word *yawm* occurs in the Qur'ān, they have invariably raised before their minds' eye the day of Judgement or the Last day. The phraseology of the words clearly points out to a day not far off. In fact, not many years had passed after the delivery of this chapter, a great event happened in the history of those, who had held to this doctrine. The conquest of Palestine by the Arabs, even as Gibbon has admitted was a day of despair for the Christian world.

[37] But the sects (which arose after him) fell at variance among themselves (about Jesus). And woe be to the great Day (of Judgement) which the disbelievers (those who have refused to believe in the clear words of Jesus) will have to witness!

[38] On the day when the offenders (those who have disregarded the words of Jesus) shall come before Us, how wondrously clear (will be) their hearing and their sight, although today they are in clear error (by refusing to admit what they had heard or seen).

[39] And warn them (O Prophet) of the day of Despair when everything shall have been settled, however much they may now be heedless (to truth) and refuse to believe (in it).

[40] Verily, it is We, Who after all are the true Master of the earth and of all who are on it; and it is to Us that they all shall have to return.

SECTION 3 : VERSES 41–50

The passage beginning with verse 41 and closing with verse 58 refers to the prophetic role of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Ishmael, and Idris (peace be on all of them), and the zeal with which they pursued their task of devotion to God. Reference to the life of Abraham has already been given in verse 74 of chapter. VI.* Further references to it are given in several other chapters to follow. The account of his life history briefly stated is this. The uncle of Abraham was an idol-worshipper. Greatly displeased with Abraham for his condemnation of idolatry, he turned his nephew out of his home in Ūr. So much so that Abraham had to repair to Can'ān where he settled down. God was good to him and he became the progenitor of a long line of prophets through Jacob and Ishmael, his two sons.

[41] Make mention of Abraham also in the Book : verily, he was a man of truth, a prophet—

[42] (Call to mind the occasion) when he said to his father : "O my father! Why worshippeth thou that which neither heareth nor seeth, nor availeth thee aught ?

[43] "O my father! Verily, to me hath come a knowledge which hath not come to thee. Follow me therefore. I will lead thee on to an even path.

[44] "O my father! Serve not Satan, for Satan has been a rebel against God.

[45] "O my father! I verily fear lest a chastisement from God overtake thee and thou become Satan's friend."

[46] Said he : "Dost thou spurn my gods, O Abraham ? If thou forbear not I will surely stone thee. Begone from me for a long while."

* Vide *The Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, Vol. II, pp. 355–359.

[47] He said: "Peace be on thee! I will pray my Lord for thy forgiveness, for, surely He is gracious to me."

[48] "I shall then pursue you no longer and all what you have called on beside God; and I (for my part) continue to call on my Lord. Haply I may not be disappointed in my prayer to my Lord."

[49] And when he had renounced them and what they had worshipped instead of God, We vouchsafed him Isaac and Jacob, and We made each of them a prophet.

[50] And We showed them Our Graciousness by investing them with the talent to speak lofty truths.

SECTION 4: VERSES 51–65

[51] And (O Prophet!) commemorate Moses in the Book, a man of purity, an apostle, a prophet.

[52] We called to him from the right side of the mountain and made him draw nigh to Us and for quiet converse:

[53] And We granted him, out of Our Graciousness, (the co-operation of) his brother, Aaron, (in the capacity of) a prophet.

[54] And (O Prophet!) commemorate Ismā'īl in the Book—one true to his promise, an apostle, a prophet,

[55] And he who enjoined on his people regular prayer, and almsgiving, and who was well-pleasing to his Lord.

[56] And commemorate Idris also in the Book—a man of truth, a prophet,

[57] And one whom We lifted to a high position.

[58] These are from among the prophets in the line of Adam, descendants of those whom We bore (in the Ark) with Noah, and descendants of Abraham and Israel, and of those whom We have guided and exalted (—these are they on whom God hath bestowed favours). Whenever the words of God, the Compassionate, were rehearsed to them, they bowed themselves down in devotion and in tears.

After this illustrious line of prophets, there came those, who deliberately neglected the attachment of faith and fell into ways, which inevitably brought them suffering. Of course, there were a number of them, who followed the way of goodness shown to them, by the prophets gone before, and prospered in life, both here and in the Hereafter.

[59] But they who came after them have rendered (the institution of) prayer sterile and yielded to lust; for, it will not be long before they face the result of their error,

[60] Except those who repent and do that which is right—it is those who shall enter the Garden and will not be wronged in the least—

[61] The Lasting Gardens, yet unseen, of which God the Compassionate hath held out a promise to His servants, a promise sure to be fulfilled.

[62] No vain words shall they hear therein
except what denotes peace; and therein
they shall have their sustenance at morn and even.

[63] This is the Garden which We will
assign to those of Our servants who
have lived righteously.

[64] (The angels would say: "We
the angels) do not come down
except by the behest of thy Lord. His is
whatever is in front of us, and whatever is
behind us, and whatever is in between. And
thy Lord is not unheedful (of them all)."

Verses 65 to 74 are addressed to the Prophet of Islam and those who were attached to him. They are exhorted to adhere to the path of truth. and bear all incidental trials with steadfastness. Trials are painful but one has to face them with confidence.

Verse 71 is not intended to apply to all human beings. Its application is evidently restricted to those who had rejected the call, and this is clear from the very preceding verse 70, and also by verse 72 coming next. The law of return is an unalterable law of life.*

The chapter 'Mary' is one of those revelations, which were delivered during the Meccan period of the prophetic mission. That was the time of acute distress for the followers of the faith. The detractors of the faith were well off in life. The Prophet's followers were mostly poor. It is why the unbelievers used to hurl taunts at the Prophet, and that only the despised or the scum of the society alone had responded to his call as will be evident from verses 73 to 76.

The Qur'ān gives an answer to those who had displayed such an attitude towards the Prophet. It points out the law of

* Vide *The Tarjuman al-Qur'an* Vol. I, pp. 68–72.

life is at work, which deals out to everyone what his action deserves. The wicked will meet with a result corresponding to their wickedness. Only the law is, however, elastic enough to permit a respite to the wicked, in order that they might reflect over their way of behaviour and make amends. It is only when this chance of reform is deliberately neglected that the inevitable result of a wicked deed overtakes and expresses itself in full. For a fuller exposition of this issue, refer to the section the Gradual Process or the law of respite in *The Tarjuman al-Qur'ān Vol I* pages 56–58.

Verse 84 clinches the issue that every respite given to the wicked is limited in its term. Once this term is allowed to slip by, the inevitable manifests itself and that was what happened in the case of the Meccans, who had persecuted the Prophet and his followers.

[65] The Lord of the heavens and the earth
and of all that is between them ! Serve Him
then, and be steadfast in service of Him.
Knowest thou anyone deserving of the name He bears?

SECTION 5: VERSES 66–82

[66] Man saith: "What! Once I am
dead, shall I really be brought to life again?"

[67] Doth not man recollect that We created
him before, when he was absolutely nothing?

[68] By the Lord then, We would assuredly
gather them together (who disbelieve in the
Hereafter) along with the devils (who have promoted
this notion in them): then We will make them
all kneel down round Hell.

[69] Then from every group of them will
We take forth those, who have been the
most forward in rebellion against God.

[70] Then it is We, Who know best which of these is most deserving of being cast into the Fire.

[71] No one is there of you who shall avoid not passing through this stage. This is what is definitely decreed by the Lord.

[72] Then will We deliver those who have been righteous, and leave the wicked to lie therein humiliated.

[73] When Our clear verses are recited to them, the unbelievers say to those who believe: "Which of the two groups is better placed and well-knit and appears a goodly company?"

[74] Many a people before them have We let go to their ruin (through their own wickedness) although they had surpassed them in riches and splendour!

[75] Say (O Prophet!): "As to those who are in error, the God of Mercy will lengthen out to them the time of respite, until they behold what they were warned against— either chastisement in the present or the Hour (of reckoning); then they shall know who were really badly placed and were disorganised.

[76] "And God will grant greater guidance to those who are already guided aright; and good deeds of permanent value, are appreciated by thy Lord and lead to good results."

[77] (O Prophet!) Hast thou marked him who hath ignored Our Signs and declared: "I shall surely have riches and children given me?"

[78] Hath he acquired any knowledge of the secrets (of God), or obtained any promise from God Himself?

[79] No! We will certainly note down what he saith and We will lengthen the period of his chastisement.

[80] (And he forgets that) all that he has spoken of (to get for himself) will in fact belong to Us, and he shall come before Us (not with all that he had secured but empty-handed) all alone.

[81] They have taken unto themselves other gods in place of God that they might be a source of honour and strength to them.

[82] But it shall not. These very gods will disown their worship of them and turn against them.

SECTION 6: VERSES 83–98

[83] Hast thou not observed that We have set the devils on the unbelievers that they might keep on inciting them?

[84] Therefore do not thou grow impatient in respect of them. (Rest assured) their days are numbered.

While coming to its close, the chapter reverts to its theme with which it started, namely the essential personality of Christ, in respect of which the Christians have fallen into an error. The issue will be clarified, asserts the Qur'ān, on the day of Resurrection, when no one will be allowed to intercede for any other, except with the permission of God. On that occasion, states the Qur'ān, everyone shall have to appear before Him singly

only as a servant of God or His creature, and not as a son of Him. The majesty of One, Who is the Creator of the universe, can hardly permit itself to be expressed in the form of a sonship to Him. The moral is presented in the closing lines, that those who act wilfully against an open truth of life, will sooner or later, meet the consequences thereof. That is the lesson of history too.

[85] One day God will certainly gather
before Him the righteous as His honoured guests.

[86] But the wicked will We direct to Hell,
like flocks taken to the watering.

[87] None shall have the power to
intercede save he who hath the permission of God.

[88] And now they say:
"God hath taken unto Himself a son."

[89] What a monstrous assertion!

[90] Well, might the very heavens be
rent, and the earth cleft asunder,
and the mountains reduced to fragments,

[91] At their blasphemous ascribing a son to God!

[92] When (as they can easily realise)
it is so repugnant to the dignity of
God to take to Himself a son.

[93] Verily, there is none in the heavens
and in the earth who shall come
to Him except as a servant.

[94] Verily, He hath taken note of
them and their exact number.

[95] And on the day of Resurrection
everyone of them shall come to Him singly, all alone.

In the last three verses, attention is drawn to a fact of history that those who had lived wickedly had to suffer in consequence and disappear leaving no trace behind. The Qur'ān, therefore, announces that the followers of the Prophet should devotedly take to the path of God, the path of righteous living. God, the Compassionate will inspire love and respect for them among the nations of the earth. So indeed did it happen. The exemplary life lived by the early followers of the faith, so attracted the attention of the people in the adjoining countries of Arabia, that wherever the Arabs went they received a warm welcome.

[96] And to those who have believed and done good deeds, God, the Compassionate will offer His Love.

[97] Verily, (O Prophet!) We have made this (the Qur'ān) intelligible for thee in thy own language that thou might easily convey therewith glad tidings to the righteous and a warning to the contentious.

[98] Many a people before them, have We let go to ruin (on their own account). Dost thou find any trace of any of them or hear any mention of them at all?

At the close of this chapter, several issues call for attention touching Christ and Christianity. These will be considered in due course under other chapters of the Qur'ān. Here we may refer only to two of them.

The Early life of Mary and the New Testament

The Qur'ān has referred to Christ in some detail in the course of this chapter, as also in 'Āl-i 'Imrān,' verses 35–63.* In this chapter, the reference to the subject begins with the prayer

* Vide *The Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, Vol. II, pp. 149–158.

of Zacharias and the birth of Yaḥyā (John the Baptist). This corresponds to the plan adopted in St. Luke. In the 'Āl-i Imrān' however, the account goes back a little further. It begins with the birth of Mary in the Temple of Jerusalem and her early life therein—a fact over which all the four gospels are silent.

It was only in the nineteenth century, when it was possible to resuscitate from the archives of the Vatican, those portions of the New Testament which had been eliminated from it, that this fact of Mary's early life, as given in the Qur'ān, was disclosed through the original Christian sources themselves.

The discarded part of the New Testament consisted of twenty-one books of the original gospel, which had been recognized as part of it from the very first century of the Christian era right upto the fourth century. It was only in 325 A. D. that the Oecumenical Council of Nice chose to discard from the Bible certain portions of it, retaining only the four Gospels as we find them in the New Testament. This was done not as a result of any research but on the basis of mere divination, such as was in vogue at the time in the west.

The Qur'ān and the birth of Christ

At the time of the advent of the Qur'ān, the Christians believed in:

(i) the birth of Christ by a virgin;

(ii) his crucifixion and resurrection;

(iii) his divinity and the doctrine of Trinity; and

(iv) the doctrine of Redemption.

The Qur'ān denied the very event of crucifixion and asserted that Christ was not crucified. What was reported as having occurred was a delusion, on the part of those who were stated to have witnessed it. The Qur'ān also countered the notion of his being God or Son of God, and also the idea of

Redemption. It made it clear, that to entertain such notions was clear infidelity to God. It emphasised that salvation lay through one's righteous deeds and not through mere faith in anyone's redemption.

It must be made clear here that while the Qur'ān discredits the three of the four beliefs of the Christians referred to above, it does not discredit their belief in the birth of Christ by a virgin.

It is no doubt true that the Qur'ān nowhere categorically asserts that Christ was born without a male parent. But at the same time, it does not deny the belief of the Christians that he was born to a virgin. In the absence of a categorical statement either way in so many words, some four scholars, chiefly the late Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and the late Dr. Towfiq Sidqi were tempted, to draw, on the basis of individual verses in the Qur'ān taken separately, conclusions contrary to the spirit and the purpose of the Qur'ānic presentation of this theme. Their method of approach is certainly not warranted by the general tenor of Qur'ānic treatment of the subject. A careful appreciation of the delicacy observed by the Qur'ān, in its references to the birth will show, that the Qur'ān is in full accord with the Christian belief, that Christ was born to a virgin.

It may be kept in view that the question of the birth of Christ had, in the time of the Prophet, become a live issue between the Christians and the Jews. The Jews regarded his birth as the result of an illicit behaviour. As against this, the Christians held this birth as valid and regarded it as a miracle. The role of the Qur'ān in this respect was to function as an arbitrator between them; and it gave its verdict. In the first place,* it proclaimed the purity of Mary's life in the following words:

> God hath selected thee for distinction, and sanctified thee and chosen thee above all women of the world
> (Q. 3 : 42)

* Vide *The Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, Vol. II, pp. 155–58.

In the second place, the Qur'ān pronounced the accusation of the Jews as a heinous calumny—(Q. 4: 156).* It gave out the account of Christ's birth, exactly in the same language as is recorded in the Evangel. The Qur'ānic account of the conversation between Mary and the angel who announced the birth of a child to her runs:

> She said: "How shall I have a boy for me when no man hath ever touched me and I have never been unchaste?" He said: "Even so shall it be. Thy Lord saith: 'This is easy for Me that We may present him to mankind as a symbol of (Our Power) and of Our Graciousness. And it is a thing decreed.'" (19: 20-21)

The corresponding passage in St. Luke runs:

> Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?
>
> And the angel answered and said unto her, the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (1: 34-35)

It is a matter for consideration, why the Qur'ān has chosen to endorse the Biblical version of the birth of Christ, and not fallen into line with the Jewish line of thought. the Qur'ānic attitude is simply this. It counters the exaggerations indulged in on either side in respect of the life and work of Christ. The Jews regarded him as a sorcerer and could not understand the miracles wrought through him by divine grace. The Christians, in their turn, were so dazzled by the miracles of Christ, that they failed to view him as one, who toiled among men in the name of God. They rushed to hail him as Son of God and at times as God Himself. The Qur'ān states that the attitude of either party was wrong.

The Christians base their doctrine of the sonship of God merely on the extraordinary circumstances in which the child was born. Likewise, they base their doctrine of Trinity on the cult of Serapis in vogue in Alexandria, during the early centuries of Christianity. It was this cult, which enabled the early Christians to replace Isis by Mary and Horus by Jesus. The Qur'ān did not go into the details of this theme. Its purpose was just to endorse the purity of the birth of Christ and announce, that his station in human life was that of a human being, inspired by God to work for the welfare of mankind. The Jews had made much of a story that Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, and that prior to her nuptials, she had been allowed to reside in the house of the parents of Joseph. That by itself does not argue, that she had any unlawful connections with him, before the formality of nuptials was observed. The Qur'ān as stated above, does not go into details and examine this story. It simply brushes it aside by proclaiming the absolute purity of Mary's character. This is the Qur'ānic way of expression. Those gifted with insight will easily see, that it is a clear endorsement of the purity of the birth of Christ, without the agency of any male parent. This was not beyond the power of God, states the Qur'ān, and that should set at rest all speculations about the birth of Christ.

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CHAPTER XX

TĀ HĀ

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1–24

As admitted on all hands, this chapter was delivered at Mecca soon after the chapter 'Maryam' was revealed. It was delivered at a time when the prophetic mission was being challenged from every side, and the pace of conversion of people to the new faith was markedly slow. Naturally, therefore the Prophet was passing through anxious times. He was conscious of the fact that the message which he delivered was meant for all mankind. But his regret was, that his own people could not appreciate its nature, and were out to give him trouble in every possible way. It is in view of this intense inward anguish, that the revelations delivered during this period of this trial were charged with a note of consolation and cheer. It is why this chapter begins with a direct address to the Prophet and his immediate companions. The Prophet is told not to lose heart. The message delivered by him was intended to better the life of mankind. Those, who would understand it and accept its guidance, would reap their reward in due course.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] *TĀ HĀ*. (O Man!)

[2] We have not sent down this Qur'ān to thee, to cause thee any distress.

[3] In fact, it is meant to be (a means of) advice for him who feareth (the consequences of evil-living).

[4] It is a Revelation from Him, Who hath created the earth and the high heavens!

[5] The God of Compassion occupieth the seat of power.

[6] His, whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, and whatsoever is between them both, and whatsoever is underground!

[7] Thou mayst not raise thy voice to express thy mental distress, for, He knoweth what lieth deep (in thy heart), and yet deeper.

[8] God! There is no God but He! Most excellent His denominations!

By way of heartening the Prophet, the Qur'ān draws his attention to the story of Moses. The story begins with an account of the manner, in which Moses received the divine call to him, to function on earth as His messenger, and as a step forward proceed to the court of Pharaoh to admonish him on the oppressive fashion in which he was ruling over his people.

In verse 12 Moses is asked to remove his shoes since he was at the time in the presence of God, an etiquette observed at the time in the courts of Egypt and Babylon. In verse 15 the 'hour coming' is taken by the commentators of the Qur'ān to refer to the Hour of judgement or the last Day. It really refers to the hour of deliverance of the Israelites from the yoke of Pharaoh to be effected by Moses. Our commentators have been in the habit of taking the word 'hour' wherever it occurs in the Qur'ān to mean always the last Day or the Doomsday.

[9] (O Prophet!), hath the story of Moses reached thee?

[10] When he noticed a far-off fire, he said to his family: "Tarry here. I see a fire. Haply I may get you a brand from it, or some one to show (us) the way."

[11] And when he reached the spot, a voice was heard, "O Moses!

[12] "I am indeed thy Lord, remove thy shoes, for thou art on holy ground in the valley of Ṭuwa;

[13] "And I have selected thee (for a high mission). Listen attentively to what is to be revealed (to thee presently).

[14] "Indeed I am God: there is no god but Me: therefore serve Me alone, and observe prayer by way of remembrance of Me.

[15] "Verily, the (appointed) Hour is coming—the exact time of it, I shall keep secret—that everyone be recompensed for what he has striven.

[16] "Therefore let not him, who believeth not therein, and who followeth his own desires, turn thee aside from this (truth) and thou perish.

[17] "What is it in thy right hand, O Moses?"

[18] Said he: "It is my staff on which I lean, and with which I beat down leaves for my sheep; and for me it has other uses also."

[19] He (God) said: "Cast it down, O Moses!"

[20] So he cast it down, and lo, it was a serpent moving about!

[21] He said: "Catch it and fear not: presently We shall restore it to its former state.

[22] "And place thy right hand into thy armpit: it will come out shining white, untarnished. (This is another sign to assure thee in advance),

[23] "That We shall show thee some of Our Signs, greater (than these two).

[24] "Go to Pharaoh for he hath grown overbearing."

Moses felt that the task assigned to him was highly onerous, and he prayed to God to grant him the necessary strength to discharge his duty to the satisfaction of his Lord.

SECTION 2: VERSES 25-54

[25] He said. "O My Lord! Expand my breast for me (or increase me in knowledge).

[26] "And make my task easy for me,

[27] "And rid me of the stammer of my tongue.

[28] "That they may understand aright my speech.

[29] "And attach to me a counsellor from among my family.

[30] "Aaron, my brother.

[31] "With him by my side strengthen my hands,

[32] "And associate him in my task,

[33] "That we may extol Thee oft,

[34] "And remember Thee oft;

[35] "For, Thou art indeed (graciously) disposed towards us."

He is told how God was gracious to him from his very infancy, and he is assured that the divine grace would keep him company even in his mission, and he is asked to take his brother Aaron with him to Egypt.

[36] He said: "O Moses! What
thou hath asked for is granted.

[37] "(Remember) at another time
We had already shown thee favours,

[38] "When We revealed to thy
mother what We revealed:

[39] "Put him (Moses) into a chest,
and cast it into the river. The river
shall throw it on the bank, and there, an enemy to
Me and an enemy unto him shall take him up.
And I have made thee (O Moses!) an
object of My Love, that thou mightest
be reared before My very Eyes.

[40] "When thy sister went and said
(to the daughter of Pharaoh who had
picked up the child); 'Shall I direct
you to one who may nurse him (Moses).'
Then We returned thee to thy mother
that she might be cheered and
not grieve. And (remember also when)
thou didst kill a person (in Egypt),
We relieved thee of thy fears,
and tried thee with (a number of) trials.
For years didst thou live among the
people of Madyan; then, Moses, hither
didst thou come, as planned (by Me).

[41] "And I have chosen thee for Myself.

[42] "And go thou and thy brother
with tokens from Me; and
be not slack in remembering Me.

[43] "Go ye both to Pharaoh, for,
he hath grown tyrannical:

[44] "And speak to him in a gentle
manner; haply he may reflect (over his past)
or fear (the consequences of his actions)."

[45] They said: "O, our Lord!
We truly fear he might break forth
against us or wrong us greatly."

[46] He said: "Fear not, for, I am with you
both. I will harken (to you) and watch (over you)."

[47] "Go ye to him then and say:
'Verily, we two are messengers of thy Lord;
therefore, send with us the Children of
Israel and give them no trouble.
It is with tokens from thy Lord are we come to thee.
Peace be on him who yieldeth to right guidance.

[48] "'For, it hath been revealed to us now
that chastisement shall overtake him who
rejecteth (the right guidance offered)
and goes his own way.'"

On Moses' meeting Pharaoh the following conversation ensues between them. What needs to be noted in this conver sation is the style of pressing his point in a discussion. It is the usual style which prophets have adopted. It is so different from that which dialecticians employ.

[49] And he (Pharaoh) said: "Who is
your Lord, O Moses?"

[50] He said: "Our Lord is He
Who giveth to everything a nature
befitting and guideth it aright."

[51] He said: "What shall await the
people gone before?"

[52] He (Moses) said: "The knowledge
of it is with my Lord, as duly recorded.
My Lord neither erreth nor forgetteth.

[53] "He hath spread the earth, as a bed
for you and hath marked out paths for
you therein, and sends down rains from heavens
and brings forth by it diverse kinds of herbs.

[54] "Eat ye and (also) feed your cattle.
Of a truth there are signs in this for men
of understanding."

SECTION 3: VERSES 55–76

[55] From it (the earth) have We created
you, and into it will We return you, and
bring you forth out of it a second time.

[56] And truly We exhibited before him
all Our signs but he treated them as
unsubstantial and refused (to admit them).

[57] He said: "Hast thou come,
O Moses, to drive us from our land by thy magic?

[58] "But assuredly we shall counter thee
with a like magic: so arrange a meeting
between us and you, which neither you nor
we shall fail to attend in a place convenient to both."

[59] He (Moses) said: "Let this meeting
be on the feast day and let the people assemble
when the sun is rising high (in broad daylight)."

An account follows of the encounter between the sorcerers of Pharaoh and Moses, during which divine help is afforded to the utter discomfiture of Pharaoh A brief account of this discomfiture has already been given in chapter 'Al-A'rāf'.* The discomfiture was so complete that the sorcerers of Pharaoh went over to the side of Moses and accepted his faith.

[60] Then Pharaoh went away and having collected his magicians came (to the meeting).

[61] Said Moses to them (the magicians) ; "Woe to you ! Do not play false with God ; for, then will He root you out through a calamity. Those who have played false (with God) have always perished.

[62] And they (Pharaoh's magicians) discussed their plan among themselves secretly.

[63] They said (to Pharaoh): "These two (Moses and his brother) are surely sorcerers who, by their sorcery, intend to drive you out from your land, and attempt to occupy your seat of authority.

[64] "So muster your strength and step forward in good form. Well, will it be for him this day who shall gain the upper hand."

[65] (Turning to Moses) said they (Pharaoh's magicians) : "Wilt thou try thy strength first or shall we ?"

[66] He said : "Well, begin ye first." And suddenly their cords and rods seem to him (Moses) briskly moving about (like serpents) by their enchantment.

* Vide *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, Vol. II, pp. 428–433.

[67] And Moses felt a fear within him.

[68] (It was at this moment that) We said (to Moses): "Fear not, for, thou shalt surely gain the upper hand.

[69] "Cast forth that which is in thy right hand, it shall swallow up what they have produced: what they have coined is but the fake of an enchanter: and whatever his move, the enchanter shall not succeed."

[70] (Frustrated thus) the magicians fell down prostrate (before Moses). They cried out; "We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses."

[71] Said Pharaoh: "Believe ye in him (Moses) before I gave you leave? Surely he is your master, who hath taught you magic. I will surely cut off your hands and feet opposite to it, and I will crucify you on the trunks of palm-trees, and you shall assuredly know which of us (I or Moses) can deal out severe and more lasting punishment."

[72] They said "We will not show greater regard to thee than (what we have to show) either to the clear tokens, which have come to us or to Him, Who hath shaped us. So decide as you may; thou canst at best decide as to the life present.

[73] "Of a truth, we believe that our Lord will pardon our sins and the sorcery, which thou hast forced us to practise, for, God is the Good, and the Lasting!"

[74] For him who comes before his Lord, having committed sin, there surely awaiteth for him Hell, wherein he shall neither die nor live.

[75] And for those who come before Him,
having believed (in God) and worked
righteously, there await loftiest places—

[76] In the gardens of Eden wherein flow
streams; therein shall they dwell for ever.
This is the reward of him who hath lived
a pure life.

Then follows an account of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, under the leadership of Moses and of what happened to them on their reaching Sinai. On the way to it Moses, who was proceeding in advance of his people, retired for a while to the mount of Ṭūr, to live there by himself and commune with God. During his absence, one of the Israelites, Samiri by name, asked their womenfolk to bring to him all their heavy golden ornaments, which they had brought from Egypt. Out of these he melted them, and carved an image of a calf, and prevailed upon the Israelites to worship it instead of God. This fact was disclosed to Moses, while he was still staying on the mount through a revelation, with the result that he had to return to his people and admonish them, for the grievous sins, which they had committed.

SECTION 4: VERSES 77–89

[77] We revealed to Moses: "Get forth
by night with My servants, and prepare
for them a dry path across the river (and pass
through it) without fear of being overtaken
(by Pharaoh) or any other fear."

[78] And Pharaoh followed them with army,
and the rising waters of the river overwhelmed them,

[79] For, Pharaoh had caused confusion
in his ranks and not guided them aright.

[80] O Children of Israel! We rescued you from your enemy, and made a promise to you on the right side of the mountain, and We let *manna* and *salwa* (forms of food) come down to you.

[81] (Said We): "Eat of the good things with which We have provided you, but not too much of it, lest I be displeased with you, for he who courts My Displeasure doth not fare well.

[82] "And surely will I forgive him who repenteth and believeth and doth good deeds by yielding to (My) guidance."

[83] And (when Moses appeared on the mount of Ṭūr God said to Moses): "What hath made thee hasten (to this place) in advance of thy people, O Moses?"

[84] He said: "They are coming up closely behind me, but to Thee O Lord have I hastened (in advance) that Thou mightest be pleased with me."

[85] He (God) said: "Of a truth, We have given opportunity to your people to remain steadfast (in devotion to God) in thy absence (from them) but Samiri has led them astray."

[86] (Having heard this), Moses returned to his people in anger and full of sorrow. He said: "O my people! Had not God held out to you a goodly promise? Did the hour of its fulfilment appear to you too far off? Or did you desire to dare the Displeasure of your Lord to light upon you for disregarding your promise to me?"

[87] They said: "It is not of our own accord
that we have failed in our promise
to thee. (The fact is that) we were obliged
to bring loads of the people's trinkets
(of gold). and we threw them (into the fire)
even as Samiri had induced us to do."

[88] (When the trinkets were melted),
he (Samiri) carved out for them a corporeal
frame of a calf producing a lowing
sound: and they said: "This is your God
and the God of Moses whom he hath forgotten."

[89] Could they not see that it (this
golden calf) returned them no answer and
did not posses any power either to hurt
or to help them?

SECTION 5: VERSES 90–104

[90] And in fact Aaron had said to them
before: "O my people! It was only meant
to test your faith: surely God (Raḥmān) alone
is your Lord: therefore follow me and
obey my bidding."

[91] They said: "We will not cease
worshipping it till Moses returns to us."

[92] He (Moses) said: "O Aaron! When
thou didst see that they had gone astray
what ailed thee,

[93] "That thou didst not carry out my
directions (during my absence). Is it not
that thou disobeyed my commands?"

[94] He said: "O son of my mother! Do
not pull me by my beard or by (the tuft of)
my head. Indeed I feared you would say:

'Thou hast indeed cut asunder the Children of Israel and hast not waited for my order.' "

[95] (To Samiri) did he (Moses) say: "What hast thou to say in this regard, O Samiri (in carving out such a calf)?"

[96] He said: "I noticed what others had not noticed: I followed in the footsteps of the messenger (Moses) to a certain extent, but (after a while) I gave this up. For so was the prompting of my heart."

[97] He (Moses) said: "Begone then! Thy doom in this life is (that you shall segregate yourself from society) to say, 'Touch me not.' And another doom shall come to pass (in the Hereafter). Now look at thy god which thou hast continued to worship. We will surely burn it down and reduce it to dust. Then will we throw it into the sea."

[98] The God of you all, is the God beside whom there is none (worthy of worship). He embraceth all things in His Knowledge.

Having cited the story of Moses and all that he had done for his people, the chapter returns to the Prophet and calls upon him not to get disheartened at the poor response, that he was receiving at the time from his people at Mecca to his call. He is assured that the law of God will have its course. Those who care to be guided aright will prosper; and they who choose to discard the divine guidance will suffer. So far as he was concerned, he should go ahead with his task undeterred by the adverse circumstances surrounding him at the time. His one concern should be to seek more and more the light of knowledge from God, that he might spread it freely among mankind.

[99] (O Prophet!) In this wise do We narrate to thee accounts of what had passed of old, and from Ourselves also have We given the indications of their import.

[100] Whoso fails to appreciate the import thereof, he shall have verily to bear the responsibility for this lapse on the day of Resurrection.

[101] In that state shall all such remain: and painful shall it be to them the bearing of this burden on the day of Resurrection.

[102] On the Day when there shall be a blast on the Trumpet, We will gather the wicked with their eyes bereft of light:

[103] They shall in a low voice say, one to another: "Ye tarried but ten (days)."

[104] We know well what they would say. The well-informed of them will however say: "Ye have not tarried beyond a day."

SECTION 6: VERSES 105–115

[105] They ask thee of the mountains (as to what will happen to them on the day of Resurrection). Say: "My Lord will scatter them powdered into dust,

[106] "Then He will level them up into a plain,

[107] "Wherein thou shalt see neither hollows nor projections."

[108] On that Day shall men follow the summoner who marcheth (them) straight on, and hushed shall be their voices before

God, (so hushed that) one shall not hear
anything except the light sound (of the feet
of marchers).

[109] No intercession shall avail on that
day, except of him whom God may allow
to intercede and whose word He is pleased to accept.

[110] He knoweth what is to happen to
them in future, and what hath already
happened to them in the past, although they
in their own knowledge, comprehend it not.

[111] And all shall bow down their heads
in humiliation before Him, the Self-subsisting,
the Ever-living : and undone will be he who
bears the burden of iniquity.

[112] And he who hath done good deeds
and is a believer. shall fear neither wrong
nor deprival of anything due (to him).

[113] It is in this way that We send down
through a Qur'ân in Arabic, and set forth
therein diverse admonitions, that haply they
may guard against evil or develop in them
the mood of introspection.

[114]. Exalted is God, the King, the Truth.
Be not hasty, (O Prophet), in implementing
any revelation of the Qur'ân before it is fully
delivered in a completed form, and (in
such a moment) say, "O my Lord, increase
me in knowledge."

In addition to citing the story of Moses to reflect on, the chapter brings to the mind of the Meccans the story of Adam also, so that they may know that suffering is the inevitable result of evil living. They should be told that, that is the lesson

of history. As for him, he should continue to bear with them and lay his trust in God, for the success of the mission with which he was entrusted by Him.

[115] And of old had We made a covenant with Adam; but he (in course of time) forgot it; and We found in him no firmness (of purpose).

SECTION 7 : VERSES 116–128

[116] And when We said to the angels: "Bow down to Adám," they all bowed down save Iblis who refused to do so.

[117] Then We said: "O Adam! This truly is an enemy to you and to your wife; let him not therefore drive both of you out of the Garden and get into trouble,

[118] "For to thee is it given that thou shalt not hunger or remain naked there;

[119] "Neither shalt thou thirst therein nor be exposed to heat (of the sun)."

[120] But Satan tempted him, saying: "Adam, shall I point out to thee the tree of immortality and of power that faileth not?"

[121] So they both ate (the fruit) thereof, and their naked state dawned on them, and they began to piece together the leaves of the garden to cover themselves. Thus it was that Adam went against the wishes of his Lord, and took to the wrong way.

[122] Thereafter his Lord raised him (from his fallen state), and turned kind towards him and gave him guidance.

[123] He (God) said: "Get ye both down from here (the pair and the seducer Iblis), one a foe to the other. Hereafter shall guidance come from Me to you (both Adam and Eve and their progeny); and whoso followeth My Guidance shall neither fall into error nor court misery.

[124] "And whoso disregards My Admonitions, truly he shall have to live a life of misery and We will raise him on the day of Resurrection bereft of sight."

[125] He will say: "O my Lord! Why hast thou raised me bereft of sight, whereas I had been endowed before with sight?"

[126] He (God) will reply: "This, because thou didst neglect Our Signs when they came to thee, (and as a result) thou art this day neglected."

[127] Even thus will We recompense him who hath fallen into excesses and cared not to believe in the Signs of his Lord; and assuredly the chastisement to follow shall be severe and lasting.

[128] Cannot they draw any lesson from the life of so many generations, whom We let go to ruin, in the midst of whose dwelling you now move about? Verily, in this (fact of history) there lie indications to men of insight (to reflect on).

SECTION 8: VERSES 129-135

[129] Had not a Decree of respite from thy Lord already gone forth and time fixed for it, assuredly the deserved judgement would have been delivered.

[130] So bear patiently what they say, and celebrate the praise of thy Lord before the sun rises, and before it sets, and also give praise to Him any time during the hours of the night and during day time also, that thou haply mayst please Him.

[131] And strain not thine eyes after that which We have conferred on several of them, in the form of the fineries of this world that We may try them therewith. That which thy Lord hath apportioned thee is better and more lasting (than what hath been given them).

[132] Enjoin prayer on thy people,
and be constant (thyself) therein.
We ask not of thee to find thine own sustenance.
It is We, Who will provide for thee.
And good shall come to the righteous.

[133] They say: "Why has he not brought with him a proof from his Lord?"
But have not clear proofs already been furnished through the previous scriptures?

[134] Had We caused suffering to overtake them by a chastisement before its time, they would surely have said: "O our Lord! Why didst thou not send us an apostle before we were humiliated and disgraced so that we might have followed Thy Signs (in obedience to Thy behest)."

[135] Say: "Everyone shall have to await the results (of what he hath done).
Wait you then (for the result) and you shall soon know which of us have followed the even path and been rightly guided."

Talk between Pharaoh and Moses

Certain aspects of the contents of this chapter need special attention. Verse 49 gives out what Moses and Pharaoh said to each other. The first question which Pharaoh put to Moses was: "Who is the Lord that you speak of?" To appreciate the significance of this question, it is necessary to have a view of the beliefs, which the Egyptians held in the time of Moses. The Egyptians worshipped a variety of deities. Some of them Nebhat, Ptah and Māt were exclusive to certain families or tribes, while others were worshipped commonly by the people as a whole. A few of the latter were taken to embody certain forces at work in the different spheres of life. For instance, Osirus was regarded as the god of the life-Hereafter, Meorut as god of the skies or heavens, Knemu as the god who fashions the form of everything, Isis the goddess which infuses life into the bodies fashioned, Thoth as the god who determines the period of existence of everything, Horus as the deity which removes pain and suffering of living bodies and Hothor (cow) as the deity which provides sustenance to life. Above all these, there stood a deity named Amon Ra or the Son of God.

Besides this doctrinal belief, the Egyptians entertained universally a belief in the divinity of Royalty; so much so that the Egyptian kings were looked upon as semi-divine in nature and were, therefore, styled Fa Ra (or Pharaoh) and were looked upon as the incarnation of the Sun-god, namely Ra. (Vide *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* —J.H. Breasted; and *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*— J. Hastings). Such being the Egyptian belief in a galaxy of deities, it was but natural for Pharaoh to have asked Moses, "Who is the Lord that you speak of?" meaning thereby, which of the deities in whom the Egyptians believed. The reply of Moses was just this. He said the God in whom he believed was One, Who had created everything in the universe and invested it with the talent to grow and develop. The reply was

significant. It was not in the form of a disputation. Moses did not condemn the beliefs of Pharaoh in so many words, but in its effect, it was a brushing aside of all his beliefs. He meant to convey to Pharaoh that it was meaningless to believe in any deity, who had jurisdiction over just an aspect of life or a sphere of it. On the other hand, the God in whom Moses believed was One, Who was Lord of every aspect and every sphere of life, and could not be vivisected into so many deities. He said he believed in one, who created everything, and who endowed it with qualities appropriate to it, and who gave it the guidance to grow and develop. He, and none else, was the God in whom he believed. The two words in his reply to Pharaoh, creation and guidance point to the fact of life, that the being of everything and the forces at work within it, are all the provisions of the God in Whom he believed (for an elucidation of this theme, see section III on 'Rububiyat or Providence' of Surat-ul-Fatiha.*

The next question put to Moses by Pharaoh was: "What is your view of those gone by? Were they all the right type of people?" Had such a question been put to one of our famous commentators, Imam Fakhruddin Razi, he would have in his answer expatiated at great length in his dialectical fashion, on a number of fancied aspects of the question. Had Moses followed this method, it would have taken the form of serious disputation. Moses did nothing of the kind. His reply was in keeping with his role as a deliverer of truth. It was but terse. He said: "The knowledge of it is with my Lord, as duly recorded. My Lord neither erreth nor forgetteth:" (verse 52). His reply meant to say, that the Lord in Whom he believed was the Lord of universe, One Who was not subject to any frailties, but One Who had power over everything and devised life to be governed by certain laws pertinent to it, in order that every action should produce a corresponding reaction. As for the generations gone before referred to in the question of Pharaoh, the reply of

* Vide *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, Vol. I, pp. 17–44.

Moses was that they were judged in this life, and would be judged in the life-Hereafter, in accordance with the nature of the deeds they had done. As for those who still lived, their primary concern was to live aright and not speculate on how others had fared in their own times.

The answer given by Moses was in the tradition of the prophets, who were to work for the good of man as the messengers of God. Their manner was not one of disputation. One argument would have led to another, leaving the issue under consideration unresolved at the end. The answer of Moses is a call for the exercise of restraint in thought. It amounts to say, that no practical purpose would be served by probing into what is beyond our immediate knowledge, or into what cannot be known in the circumstances of human life. In but a few words Moses puts a stop to wild speculations on themes, over which men have tried to wax eloquently without knowledge of what they say, and wasting their precious time. Had this simple line of action been observed by the followers of the different faiths, mankind would have avoided the numerous religious conflicts which had marked the course of human history.

Even within the body of Islam, to confine only to the present generation and the generation just preceding it, how many meaningless issues have been allowed to crop up for meaningless discussions. The questions which have engaged the minds of certain class of Muslims were simply this: whether so and so or such and such section of Muslims was true to the faith, and if so, to what extent; or whether so and so was a more highly spiritual personality than so and so. Those who raise such questions should pause to reflect, whether they are conducting themselves aright in life or what they themselves should do to be useful to themselves and useful to those around them. Instead of developing this spirit of introspection in themselves and thereby proving themselves useful to life, they

delight in spurious discussion over things which do not concern them in their immediate bearings. The Qur'ān makes everyone responsible for what he does. It is no part of his belief to what extent X, Y or Z had lived a pious life in the past. What is regretful is, that those who indulge in such speculations even go to the length of consigning the followers of this creed or that to Hell-fire or perdition and assigning places of honour in Heaven to anyone they please, just on the basis of their fancied evaluations.

Only some fifty years back, a section of Muslims in Syria burnt down the living quarters of another section, simply because one section regarded Shaik Abdul Qader Jeelani as the greatest of saints while the other section contended that Shaik Ahmed Rifā'i held that position, and necessarily they should hurt each other. Such was the mentality developed! Now, India itself can furnish an example of this wrong approach to faith. I have myself received a number of letters from various quarters asking me which of the two was a great saint. Indeed some of the writers desired me to regard the saint of Baghdad as the greatest of saints and some others to recognise the saint of Sarhind (in India). They asked me to announce behind which of the two, a Muslim should offer his daily prayers. Once I was tempted to answer that no one should offer prayers behind the followers of either of them.

When the four schools of *fiqh* or Islamic law were founded in the early centuries and the condition was laid on every Muslim not to deviate in the slightest degree from the findings of anyone of them, the question naturally arose to which of the four schools one was to attach oneself. Further, the question also arose which of their founders in particular, Imam Abu Hanifa or Imam Shafa'i, was the better of the two. The issue gave rise to violent conflicts between the followers of the two imams. At one time, the controversy took so serious a turn in Khorasan that the followers of one school opened the gates of the city to

the hordes of the notorious Halaku, the grandson of an equally notorious army-leader Chengiz Khan, to put down their rivals. Curiously, the marauding army in their zest for loot and arson spared neither the Shāfa'is nor the Hanafites themselves Likewise, the religious differences in faith between the Shias and Sunnis have torn the body of the Islam into two sects. What was the root cause of all these disturbances in life? It was the same old tendency to apportion priority of honour to particular individuals of their choice, from among these, who had gone before them. Over thirteen hundred years have passed, since the Qur'ān was delivered and yet the significance of the Qur'ānic phrase "The knowledge of it is with my Lord, as duly recorded. My Lord neither erreth nor forgetteth," has not been fully realised. The right course for everyone of the Muslims, who cares to live at peace with himself and live at peace with his external world of relations, is to go by the facts of life as one knows them through rational means, or as disclosed by the Qur'ān and to mould one's life accordingly, without struggling to know things unknown to anyone, and of no significance to one's present day life. God has never placed before us, what all He has recorded of what everyone had done, nor have we any right to assign stations in life to those, who have gone before us. One has first to set oneself right without prying into the lives of those gone by and whom one has never met.

Samiri and the Worship of the Calf

Verse 87 refers to the Jews who had taken to the worship of a golden calf during the absence of Moses. The account of this development differs materially from that given in the Torah. In the Exodus 1 : 32, it is stated that it was Harūn (Aaron), the brother of Moses, who had originally made a golden image of a calf. The Qur'ān disagrees from this statement and asserts that it was Samiri who did it with sinister motives. The question arises :-"Who was this Samiri? Was Samiri, the proper name of a person or was it the title by which he was known among

his people ?" In all probability, the term as applied to him means a member of a tribe bearing that name. For, there are references in Arabic literature to the effect that there existed in early times, a tribe going by that name. Indeed even today there exists in Iraq a section of its people bearing that name. Further, the Qur'ān refers to him as Al-Samiri and this is not the form in which a proper name is constituted. On the other hand, it denotes his nationality making thereby clear, that this person under reference was not an Israelite or a Jew.

Samiri Civilisation

Some three thousand and five hundred years before Christ, there dwelt two tribes in the doab of Euphrates and Tigris who gave rise to a magnificent civilisation. One of them had originally migrated to this area from the Arab land. The other tribe seems to have come here from the north, and it was this tribe that was known as Samiri. The name of the town of Samar is definitely styled after the name of this tribe. Its site has recently been discovered in Tal-al Ubaid. The excavations carried on there have unearthed quite a number of articles and ornaments made of gold.

Who were these Sumiris ?

It has not been possible till now to say definitely who were the people known as the Samiris. The excavations at Nineveh have brought to light the library of King Assurbanipal of Nineveh known to the Greeks as Sardanapalus (d. 626 B.C.). In this library, there was found a bilingual dictionary of words in Akkadi and Sumeri. The scripts of the two languages resemble each other. It is probable that the generic title Sami or Semitic collectively applies to a number of dialects of which Sumeri was one.

Just as one branch of the human family, which had its home in Mongolia spread itself through successive migration over Central Asia, North India, Iran, Anatolia, and Western Europe, even so another branch which had it home in the pen-

insula of Arabia migrated to the adjoining parts of Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Armenia and the territory along the shores of Persian Gulf. Thus it was that the Arab culture spread itself beyond the confines of Arabia. It is possible that the tribes mentioned in the *Book of Genesis* as having flourished in the south of Iran in ancient times belonged to the Arab stock. (A reference to the people of this part of Iran will also be found in the notes given under the chapter, 'Noah').

From the facts made available about the Samiris, it may be stated that their original home was Iraq and that their number had gradually so increased that they had to spread themselves over a good portion of the adjoining areas. The fact has been brought to light, that they had established connections with the people of Egypt, even as far back as a thousand years before Christ. It was thus that one of the Samiris therein had attached himself to Moses and accompanied the Israelites on their march to their homeland. It is this person that the Qur'an refers to as Al-Samiri.

It may be pointed out that the Samiris as a class worshipped the bullock, the cow and the calf, even as the Egyptians. The face of the Egyptian goddess, Horus, resembled that of a cow The belief among the Egyptians was that the earth rested on the back of a cow. When Samiri, who had accompanied the Israelites found that Moses had tarried behind and was not to be found among his followers, he asked them to collect some of their golden ornaments. These ornaments he melted and carved out of the molten gold in the image of a calf. Having had the opportunity to live among the image-makers of Egypt, he contrived to let the image of the cow, that he had carved, produce a hollow sound.

Faith of Samiri

Attracted to Moses, Samiri had first accepted the Semitic faith. But he was at heart not quite in sympathy with the Israelite belief in the Unity of God. So, after a while, he turned

away from the faith of Moses. It was when Moses returned to his people, and found that they had taken to the worship of the image of a calf, carved out for them by Samiri, that he asked of Samiri "What was it that you had done?" He said: "I noticed what others had not noticed; I followed in the footsteps of the messenger (Moses) to a certain extent, but (after a while) I gave this up. For so was the prompting of my heart:" (verse 96). The Israelites had coined a story that in their setting up of this image of the calf, a spiritual force was at work, which Samiri alone could notice and none else. The story was that, while the Israelites were returning from Egypt, Samiri had noticed that a messenger of God, the angel Gabriel, was leading them back to their homeland riding a horse—the horse of Life, and that the ground touched by the feet of the horse was invested with the power to generate new life in everything, and that it was from this ground, that Samiri has taken out a handful of dust and put it in the hollow of the golden image of the calf, to let it gain the power to strike its notes from within it. So it was that the Israelites had been induced by Samiri to take to the worship of the golden calf that he had made.

Of course, Moses discredited the entire story and severely remonstrated his people against the serious error into which they had fallen. But strange as it seems, a number of the early commentators of the Qur'ān could not see that the very concept of an image growing articulate was repugnant to the very teaching of the Qur'ān. The fact is that Samiri had contrived to deceive the Israelites by a stratagem, but he could not succeed in his attempts, since Moses had come back to the Israelites and set things right.

PART XVII

Chapter XXI

THE PROPHETS—AL-ANBIYĀ

CHAPTER XXI

THE PROPHETS—AL-ANBIYĀ

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1: VERSES 1–10

This is one of those chapters which were delivered at the close of the Meccan period of the prophetic mission. It was revealed after the chapter 'Abraham' and before the chapter 'Al-Mu'minūn' or 'The Believers.'

This chapter as a whole is in the form of a final admonition to the Meccans that the time is not far off, when they shall have to face the results of their intransigence. It anticipates the crisis lying ahead of them; and this came about in the form of the Prophet's migration *(hijrat)* to Madina, which marked the beginning of the success of the prophetic mission and the frustration of all the hopes of the Meccans to subdue the Prophet.

The following passage gives a picture of the manner in which the Meccans had tried to discredit the message of the Prophet. The Qur'ān answers them that there is a law at work in life, which settles the affairs of man—the law which settles the conflict between the true and the false, by letting the true prevail over the false. This truth of life, one may easily find out for himself, if he looks back on the annals of those people, who had deliberately flouted any message of truth offered to them for their guidance. The Qur'ān has repeatedly asserted, that all that there is in the heavens and in the earth has not been created in vain, and that a specific purpose underlies the creation of every object and that it is upto man to understand and appreciate this purpose, and try to fulfil it in his life, believing always that it is a purpose fixed by God, the Almighty Creator of the universe. It is only when man fits into the divine plan

of life that he can profit by it. The Qur'ān makes it clear that that has been the message sent to man by God, through everyone of His Prophets from the very beginning of human life.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] The time of reckoning is drawing nigh, and yet people keep away (from the right path) so carelessly!

[2] They only listen (to verses of the Qur'ān recited only) to mock every fresh warning that cometh to them from their Lord.

[3] Their hearts are set on vanities: and they, the wrongdoers, say in secret discourse: "Is he (the Prophet) more than a man like anyone of you? Will you with open eyes accede to sorcery?"

[4] He (the Prophet) said: "My Lord knoweth what is even whispered whether in the skies or in the earth: He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing."

[5] They say: "Nay, they (the revelations) are a medley of fancies! Nay, he hath forged it (the Qur'ān): nay, he is just a poet! Let him come to us with a token as the prophets of old came with."

[6] No people of any city, which We have destroyed before, had ever believed (in the message of their prophet). Will these men believe (in thy message)?

[7] And, (O Prophet!) We did not send any before thee except men to whom We delivered Our Revelations. Ask (the unbelievers)

to get a confirmation of this, from those
(the people of the earlier scriptures),
who are aware of it, if you know it not.

[8] We did not give them (the prophets)
bodies which could dispense with food;
and We never meant them to live for ever.

[9] Then We made good the promise We
made to them, and saved them and those whom
We pleased. But We had destroyed
those who had committed excesses.

[10] And now We have sent down a Book
to you (mankind) wherein there is
admonition for you. Can you not even
now understand (what you have to do)?

SECTION 2: VERSES 11–29

[11] And how many people dwelling in
cities have We not overthrown, for their iniquities
and raised up in their place other peoples!

[12] When they (the guilty) felt the
pressure of Our Chastisement, they began
to rush out from their cities.

[13] "Flee not," (it had been said to them),
"but return to your dissipating revelries
and to your abodes! It is likely that you may
have to give information (in respect of
things left behind by you)."

[14] They said: "Woe be to us! Truly,
We have been wrong-doers."

[15] And their cries ceased not till they were
completely mowed down, extinguished.

[16] And We created not the heavens and
the earth, and what is between them in sport.

[17] Had it been Our Wish to find a pastime, surely, We would have found it in Our Ownself, if it were ever becoming of Us to entertain such a wish.

[18] Nay, We will hurl truth at falsehood and it shall strike it, and lo, falsehood shall disappear. But woe be to you for what you impute (to God)!

[19] Every being in the heavens and in the earth is His, and even they who are privileged to be in His Presence do not feel absolved from devotion to Him, and do not feel weary (in this pursuit).

[20] They praise Him night and day and seek no rest.

[21] Have they taken any gods from the earth who can revive (the dead)?

[22] Were there any gods besides God in either (heaven or earth), the two would surely have fallen into disorder. But glory be to God, the Lord of the Throne! He is beyond all what they attribute to Him!

[23] He shall not be questioned on what He doeth; (on the other hand) it is they who shall be questioned (on what they do).

[24] Or, have they taken others for gods in place of Him? Then (O Prophet!) say to them): "Bring forth your proofs. This (divine message as delivered through the Qurân) is meant to be an admonition to those, who, are with me and (even as the self same message as delivered through the earlier scriptures) was meant to be an admonition to those, who have gone before me. But most of

them know not this truth: so they turn away (from thee).

[25] And no apostle have We sent before thee (O Prophet!) to whom We did not reveal: "Verily there is no God beside Me: so be devoted to Me."

[26] And they say: "God hath taken (angels) for His offspring." Transcendent in purity is He! Nay, these are but His honoured servants:

[27] They precede Him not in speech: and they only carry out His Commands.

[28] He knoweth what is in front of them and what is behind, and they intercede not save for whom He pleaseth; they always stand in awe of Him.

[29] And if anyone among them sayeth: "I am a god beside Him," will We consign him to Hell. Thus do We requite those who exceed their limits.

The Qur'ān suggests that there should have been no difficulty for anyone to believe in the unity of God, if one could ponder on the working of the universe. It emphasises that the very existence of order and harmony in the phenomenal world, is a positive proof of the existence of a Single All-powerful Being, Who must have created it and regulated its working. This style of argument or of appealing to Nature to offer proof of the unity of God is a peculiarity of the Qur'ān and is discussed at length in the commentary of the 'Surat-ul-Faṭiha,' in volume I of the *Tarjuman Al-Qur'ān* and also in the commentary of the chapter 'Jonah' (pages 96-97).

SECTION 3: VERSES 30–41

[30] Cannot the unbelievers realise that the heavens and the earth were (in the beginning) of a piece together, and that We separated them, and through water did We give life to everything? Will they not then believe (in God, the Maker of the universe)?

[31] And We have set firm in the earth mighty mountains lest it should shake along with them (mankind and other living objects thereon), and We made on it broad passages between them to guide them (in their movements).

[32] And We have made the sky a safe roof for them; yet they do not reflect over its signs.

[33] And He it is, Who hath created the night and the day, and the sun and the moon, each moving in its sphere.

The Meccans used to delight in the thought, that the Prophet would not live for ever and so yearned for his early death, that they might get rid of him. The Qur'ān answers that death is not exclusive to the Prophet.. It overtakes them also. What matters in life is not so much death, as how one has to come out of the struggle betweeen truth and falsehood, which engages everyone's life on earth.

[34] And (O Prophet!) never before have We granted to a man the life that shall last for ever: so when thou hast to die, how shall they live forever.

[35] Every soul has to taste death. And to test you, We try you with evil and with good; and unto Us shall you be brought back.

[36] And when the unbelievers see thee, they only scoff at thee (saying): "Is this he who speaks so lightly of your gods?" Yet when they themselves speak of God, they do it disparagingly.

The disbelievers used to ask of the Prophet, when would the promised chastisement of his God overtake them. The Qur'ān answers that man is hasty by nature and so he desires to see everything to happen quickly. But it asks them whether their gods would protect them when that event happens? The Prophet is asked to tell them, that even as a book of guidance was delivered through Moses to his people, a book of guidance was offered them through the Prophet of Islam, namely the Qur'ān, that they might live a happy life by following its directions. It was upto them to accept it or reject.

[37] Man is made hasty in nature. Soon shall I make manifest to you My Signs. Do not then grow unnecessarily restive.

[38] And they say: "When is this threat (to be made good), if you are so sure of what you say?"

[39] (The unbelievers would not have put this question), had they only known the time, when they shall not be able to keep the Fire away from their faces or from their backs, and when they shall not have the chance of being helped.

[40] Aye! It shall come on them suddenly and shall confound them; and they shall not be able to put it back, nor shall they be respited.

[41] Apostles before thee had been equally scoffed at (for the warning given by them): but that (the chastisement of which they had been warned) which they had treated so lightly, did inevitably encompass the scoffers.

SECTION 4 : VERSES 42–50

[42] Ask them, (O Prophet!): "Who shall protect you by night or by day from the displeasure of God?" Yet they avoid expressing thankfulness to their Lord.

[43] Have they, then, any gods of theirs who can defend them against Us. Their gods have no power to help themselves; much less can they screen them from Us.

[44] Aye, We have given them and their forebears means of enjoyment during the full length of their lives, however long. Do they not see that the earth is growing narrow for them from every side. Can they get over it?

[45] (O Prophet) tell (them): "I only warn you of what hath been revealed to me." But the deaf will not however heed the warning, when given.

[46] Yet even at the slightest touch of thy Lord's chastisement, they will cry out, "Oh, woe to us! We indeed have been in the wrong."

[47] Balances well poised will We set up on the Day of Resurrection (to weigh the deeds of men); and no one shall be wronged in the least; even were the work (of anyone) of the weight of but a grain of mustard seed, We will take it into account: and We are scrupulously accurate in reckoning.

[48] And assuredly We gave to Moses and Aaron the Criterion, (in order that it might offer) light and guidance to those who care to live aright—

[49] They who fear their Lord
even without having ever beheld Him and
feel apprehensive of the hour (of Judgement).

[50] And this (the Qur'ān) which
We have sent down is a blessed Counsel.
Will you even then disregard it?

Then follows an account of Abraham, and of all that he did to persuade his people to give up polytheism and believe in the unity of God, and also of his migration to Can'ān in the company of his nephew, Prophet Lot, where he settled down and became the progenitor of an illustrious line of prophets. A detailed reference to Abraham's migration to Can'ān is already furnished under verses 66–83 of chapter 'Hūd.'

SECTION 5: VERSES 51–75

[51] Aforetime We had given to Abraham
a course to follow, since We
knew he was worthy of it.

[52] Call to mind the occasion
when he (Abraham) said to his father and
to his people: "Of what value are these
images (to you) to whom you are so devoted?"

[53] They said: "We found our
forebears worshipping them."

[54] He said: "Truly you—you and
your forebears—have been in manifest error."

[55] (They said): "Hast thou really come to
us in right earnest or art thou simply jesting?"

[56] He said: "Aye, your Lord
is the Lord of the heavens and of the earth
Who hath fashioned them both;
and to this do I bear witness.

[57] Abraham said: "And, by God!
I shall deal (in my own way) with
your idols after you have retired."

[58] So he broke them all into pieces except
the chief of them, that to it they might return.

[59] They enquired: "Who hath done
this to our gods? Cruel indeed is he."

[60] They (those who knew this)
said: "We heard a youth make mention
of them—one called Abraham."

[61] They said: "Then bring him before
the people's eyes, that they may bear witness."

[62] They asked: "Hast thou,
O Abraham, done this to our gods?"

[63] He said: "Likely he, the chief of them,
hath done it: ask them (the broken
idols) if they can speak."

[64] They then talked among themselves
and said: "We ourselves are responsible for this."

[65] Then crest-fallen they said (to Abraham):
"Thou knowest they (the idols) speak not."

[66] He said: "Then why do you
worship instead of God, that which neither
can do you any good nor harm you?

[67] "Fie on you and all that you worship
instead of God! Can you not understand this much?"

[68] They said: "Burn him and aid
your gods, if you can but do it."

[69] We ordered: "O fire, turn
cold and be a refuge for Abraham."

[70] And they sought to lay a plot against him: but We made them fail therein miserably.

[71] And We brought him and Lot safely to the land (Can'ān) which We have hallowed for all mankind.

[72] And We granted him Isaac and as a further gift (of grandson) Jacob, and We made all of them (they and their progeny) righteous.

[73] And We made them guides to lead people in accordance with Our Direction, and We inspired them to do good deeds and to remain constant in prayer and to give alms; and they were intently devoted to Us.

The chapter then refers to Prophet Lot and Prophet Noah, who had gone before him, to state how God had helped both of them against their detractors.

[74] And unto Lot, We gave insight and knowledge; and We rescued him from the city (the people of which were) indulging in foul deeds—a perverse people, given to evil living.

[75] And We admitted him (Lot) to Our Grace, for he was of the righteous.

SECTION 6 : VERSES 76–93

[76] And call to mind the occasion when Noah had cried to Us aforetime, and We had heard him and delivered him and his family from a great calamity.

[77] And We helped him against the people, who were making light of Our Signs.

They were verily a wicked people,
and We drowned them all.

Then follows a reference to David and Solomon. The passage refers to the marvellous talents of David with which he was gifted. One of these talents was the melody of his voice, so much so that, whenever he communed with God and raised his voice in praise of Him through his psalms, the birds around him and even inanimate objects seemed to be deeply moved with them. It was during his time, that the Israelites spread themselves over the entire area of Palestine and formed a kingdom, which developed into a mighty naval power under Solomon.

[78] And when David and Solomon
gave their decisions touching the dispute over
some people's sheep having caused a waste in a
field of others, We endorsed their decision.

[79] So We had given Solomon,
a right understanding into the affair, and
on both of them We had bestowed insight
and knowledge; indeed, We had constrained
even mountains declaring Our Glory
and birds subservient to David;
and all this was of Our Doing.

[80] And We taught him (David)
the art of making coats of mail for you
(men in general) to defend you from each
other's attack. Are you truly thankful?

[81] And to Solomon We had subjected
the strong winds blowing (from the sea)
to speed at his bidding towards
the land We had blessed; (carrying his
mercantile ships thereto) for We were aware of
all things (or what was needed by the land).

[82] And We (subjected also) sundry
satans to dive (in the sea) for him and perform
other works beside, and We kept a watch over them.

Here follows a reference to the prophets Job, Ishmael, Idris and Dhul Kifl, who as the Qur'ān states, bore in the pursuit of their mission, trials of diverse sorts with exemplary steadfastness, and implicit trust in God. The *Old Testament* devotes one full book to the sufferings of Job cheerfully borne.

[83] And call to mind the occasion when
Job had cried to his Lord. "I am in acute
distress: but Thou art the Most Merciful
of those who show mercy.

[84] So We heard him and removed
the distress he was in: and We gave him a
family, and along with members a like number
(of kindred) as a mercy from Us and
a memorial for those who are devoted to Us.

[85] Similar was the case of Ishmael,
Idris and Dhul Kifl—all
steadfast in endurance of trials.

[86] And We showed them all Our Mercy
for they were of the righteous.

The reference is made to the favours vouchsafed by God to Dhul Nūn, Zacharias and Mary, mother of Christ:

[87] And call to mind the occasion
when Dhul Nūn had departed in anger,
thinking that We had no power over him.
But (when things went seriously wrong with him)
he cried out in the darkness (of his
distressed mind): "There is no God but
Thou: Glory be unto Thee!
Verily, I have been in the wrong."

[88] So We heard him and rescued him from distress. It is thus that We rescue the believers.

[89] Call to mind the occasion,
when Zacharias had called upon his Lord
saying: "O My Lord, do not keep me
lonely (without someone to look after me
in this life and to keep my memory alive
when I am gone), although (I know) Thou art
the best of those who look after."

[90] So We heard him and gave him
John by making his wife fit for child-bearing.
Verily, they vied with each other in
goodness, and called upon Us in love and
reverence and were ever submissive to Us.

[91] And into her (Mary), who had kept
her maidenhood, We breathed of
Our Spirit, and made her and
her son Jesus a sign for all mankind.

It may be noted that the thought-content of this chapter is summed up in verse 92. The idea running through it is this, that all the prophets who appeared in the world, to better the life of man by guiding him to the path of righteous living, emphasized the eternal truth that all mankind is but one single community and that they should, therefore, live together for the welfare of each other and of the community as a whole. The idea postulated another truth that there could be but a single God for all of them, the God Who had created them and provided them with the necessary means of their sustenance, even as He had created everything also in the universe. But the regret of the Qur'ān is, that man himself had endeavoured to break this unity, this single society of man into sects, one running down every other. The Qur'ānic call is, therefore, to set aside all differences, which had arisen among mankind and

return to a united life devoted to the service of God and His creation. The Qur'ān also makes it clear, that salvation depends on right living or right deeds. Even the evil or the good that one does, will have its own return and none shall be denied what he has worked for. That was the message of all the prophets; and mark that the Qur'ān has emphasised, that His messengers have appeared in all parts of the globe and among every section of mankind. The message embodied in this chapter is that mankind should return to God, the One, Who is the source of all life, and live together as a single family.

[92] (The message which We delivered
through all these messengers from Us
was this): of a surety, this community of
yours (mankind) is but one community,
and I am your Lord; therefore serve Me.

[93] But they differed among themselves
(and divided themselves into sects) in
respect of the objective (of the *din* or way of
life laid for them, forgetting that) all shall have to
return to Us (to account for what they did).

SECTION 7: VERSES 94–112

[94] (And mark that) whoso shall do
the things that are right and be a believer,
his effort (to do the right) will not
be disowned; and surely will
We write it down (in his favour).

[95] There is a ban on all those cities which
We have destroyed, that they shall not rise again,

[96] Even when a way is opened
for Gog and Magog to hasten
(to their help) from every high land.

[97] The promised hour to deal out justice will certainly draw on (in its own time) when the eyes of the unbelievers will be dazed (at the sight before them at that hour). (And they shall cry out): "Oh, our misery, how forgetful were we of this! We were indeed a wicked lot!"

[98] You and what you had worshipped instead of God shall form fuel for Hell: go ye down into it.

[99] If they are really gods, they will not go down into it; (but since they are not gods), they shall all abide therein for ever.

[100] Therein shall they groan; and there they shall hear nothing but groaning.

[101] But they for whom We have ordained bliss in advance, shall be kept far away from it (Hell).

[102] Even the slightest sound therefrom, they shall not hear; and they shall live forever in that (bliss) which they had longed for.

[103] The great terror (of Hell) shall not disturb them in the least, and the angels will meet them (to greet): "This is your Day which you were promised."

[104] On the Day, We roll up the heavens as one rolleth up written scrolls. We will bring forth a fresh creation, even as We had brought forth the first creation. This is a promise which bindeth Us. Surely, We will fulfil Our Promise.

In the summing up the note is struck, that the message delivered through all the prophets for the guidance of man, revolves round the basic idea that God is but One and that happiness comes to man, both here and in the Hereafter, through righteous action alone. The picture is given of what follows evil living, and what is afforded as a reward to those who live righteously.

The closing lines are addressed to the Prophet of Islam. Even as in the opening lines, he is desired by God not to feel sad over the intransigence shown by his people at Mecca in refusing to accept the divine message. He is asked to go ahead with his mission and is assured that those, who had rejected him will soon be made to realize the loss that they were in the long run.

[105] And after the Law was given
(to Moses), did We write in the Psalms
(of David), "My servants, the righteous,
shall inherit the earth."

[106] Verily, in this (promise) is
a heartening note for those who are
sincere in their devotion (to Us).

[107] (O Prophet!) We have not sent thee
except to be a source of mercy to all mankind.

[108] Declare: "Verily, what is revealed
to me is this: 'Your God is the only God—the One.'
So is it not upto you to bow down to Him?"

[109] But if they turn away, then say:
"I have delivered the truth in a manner
clear to one and all; and I knew not whether
the promised Hour (of recompense for
what one believes or does) is nigh or distant.

[110] "God knoweth both what
you speak out and what you hide.

[111] "And I fear that the time of
respite given you (to make amends) will
probably be wasted in idle pleasure."

[112] He (the Prophet) said (to them):
"Let my Lord deliver His right Judgement
It is only from our Lord, the Compassionate,
help is to be sought against what
you have ascribed to Him."

Gog and Magog

In the chapter 'Al-Kahf,' a reference has already been made to the depredations of Gog and Magog. A further reference to them is made in verse 96 of this chapter. It has already been pointed out that Gog and Magog were the Tartars of Mongolia, who from time to time emerged out of their homeland to sweep across vast areas of Asia and Europe, even before the advent of the Qur'ān. The reference in verse 96 of this chapter is an anticipation of a coming event, namely, the further emergence of the Tartars in the time of Chengiz Khan (d. 1227) and Halaku as a sequel to the differences, that arose in the body of Islam in medieval times. The object of the verse is to warn mankind in general, that instead of living together as a single community, should they continue to divide themselves into an increasing number of rival groups, they would perish in the hands of Gog and Magog or those forces which gather strength, when mankind grows weak through their internal dissensions.

The havoc wrought on the Muslims by the Tartars under Chengiz Khan, including the fall of Kiev in 1219 and the sack of Baghdad in 1258, was the result of violent tension between the Sunnis and the Shias. Likewise, the catastrophe which overtook the Muslim states in central and west Asia, in the time of Halakū, the grandson of Chengiz Khan, was the result of an equally acute tension between the Hanafites and the Shāfa'is. It was the Muslims themselves, who were responsible for their

own downfall. The Law of God (or the Law of Requital), has always its appointed course. If instead of living together as a single community, mankind should create and sustain differences and pursue them obstinately, it necessarily has to bear the consequences thereof, and so it was in the body of Islam The story of the past suffering resulting from disunity among men should be an eye-opener to the Muslims of the present day and others beside them.

Who shall inherit the Earth?

Verse 105 of this chapter clearly points out the eternal law of life, which mankind will have to follow, if they should care to prosper in life. It states that this law was clearly announced through Prophet Moses, that only the righteous shall be allowed to rule over the earth. The term for the righteous as used in the Qur'ān is *ṣāleḥīn*, or those who regulate their own lives on similar lines. The root meaning of the term denotes peace, as opposed to disturbance in life. The idea is that they who disturb life will reap the consequence thereof. The consequence in the former case is suffering, whereas in the latter it is prosperity, both for the individual and the community as a whole. This truth was repeatedly stressed by all the prophets of God. Psalm 37 in the *Book of Psalms* refers to this law of life and states :–

> Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evil-doers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. (8,9).

If one should glance across the pages of history, it will not be difficult for him to find, that it is this law of life that has been at work; in the life of nations even as in the life of individuals. It is the law of survival, not of the physically strong, but of those who have developed the talent to live at peace with themselves individually and at peace with others. It is this talent for a peaceful existence which matters and which contributes to one's survival in the struggle of life. The law is an expression

of the divine way of the very nature of everything created. So long as it preserves its sense of harmony, it lives: and once it disturbs this talent, it will have to face the consequences thereof. That is the way of God, *Sunnat Allah* as the Qur'ān styles it. The Qur'ān asserts that this law never changes.

The Qur'ān, therefore, holds out the unalterable promise of God, that those who adhere or conform to this law of peace and harmony in life, shall prosper:

> Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good, that He will surely make them rulers in the earth as He made those before them rulers, and that He will surely establish for them their religion, which He has chosen for them, and that He will surely give them security in exchange after their fear. They will serve Me, not associating aught with Me. And whoever is ungrateful after this, they are the transgressors.
>
> (Q. 24: 55)

Abraham and the Incident of his Idol-breaking

The notes given above have covered the contents of the chapter in a large measure. But there is one aspect of it which needs special attention. This is the incident of the breaking of idols by Prophet Abraham. Some of commentators of the Qur'ān have searched for loopholes in the life of this prophet. They maintain that this prophet made statements on three occasions which might be considered as being contrary to truth, or might amount to falsehood. One of those incidents is that of his idol-breaking which is narrated in verses 57–67.

When he was asked by these people: "Hast thou, O Abraham, done this to our gods?" his reply was: "Likely he, the chief of them, hath done it: ask them (the broken idols) if they can speak." Although Abraham knew full well it was he who had done it. The commentators of the Qur'ān base their accusation on a doubtful *hadīth* attributed to the

Prophet of Islam. But the moot question is this: "Did any such incident happen, which may give rise to the suspicion that Abraham had spoken an untruth however slight its nature?" It seems so strange that our commentators should have fancied, that even the prophets, who are the upholders of truth could utter lies. They had not realised that levelling a charge against any prophet merely on the basis of some doubtful report is not a scholarly way.

Take the incident under reference for scrutiny. Among the centres of population which arose in early times in the doab of the Euphrates and the Tigris there was a place known as Ūr. It was situated in the south of Iraq on the bank of the Euphrates and probably it was the original name of the town Tal-al-Ubaid. Excavations on this site have brought a fund of knowledge, touching the life and thought of the people who dwelt here in ancient times. The knowledge made available is to the effect, that the system of idol-worship which prevailed in a flourishing style in Ninevah and Babylon had its beginnings in this town of Ūr. The deities worshipped here represented the different planets of the stellar world. The chief deity Shams represented the sun, around which the lesser stars of deities were stationed. One of them was the guardian of Ūr itself, known as Nāni'ār, which represented the moon. One of the ancient temples excavated lay on a mount close by this ancient site, and it was dedicated to the moon goddess.

It may be pointed out here that this system of idol-worship was regulated by a priestly class of people enjoying special privileges in society. It was in this town and such an atmosphere of image-worship, that Prophet Abraham appeared as a messenger of God. His father, Tārikh, died while Abraham was still a child, and it was his uncle who brought him up. This uncle of his, belonged to the priestly class and held the office of Adār, which in the Chaldean language meant a chief priest. It was this Adār which, in later times, came to be pronounced in Arabic as Azar. And that is the word employed in the Qur'ān.

When Abraham opened his eyes in his childhood on the world around him in his native place, he found that his own house was a veritable temple, several idols residing therein. But, his mental get up was so constituted by nature, that he could neither appreciate the atmosphere around him nor the beliefs entertained by his family. He felt it was his family that needed to be brought to the straight path, and this he did before he ventured to approach others. He advanced for the consideration of everyone the dictates of human nature and the demands of reason. But he soon found that his people were so deeply attached to the ways of their forebears, that he felt that it was futile to reason with them. Whatever argument he could advance to make them go the right way, the reply that he received from them was always the same, that what he advanced conflicted with the ways of their forebears, whom they honoured. He found that it was impossible for anyone to convince them, that the idols they worshipped had absolutely no power in them either physically or spiritually. To all that he said to them, he was met with the reply:

> Hast thou really come to us in right earnest or art thou simply jesting? (verse 55)

Indeed he was regarded as a mad man. Abraham was convinced in his mind that the way to deal with people such as these, was not the way of argumentation or of an appeal to reason. He felt he must adopt a method different from this, which could bring home to them the truth, that he was anxious to make them accept. That method he thought was to let them realise themselves by their own experience, that the idols they worshipped had no power in themselves, nor do they do any good, and that they were no more than mere dead stones. The need of the moment was, to let the idols themselves demonstrate before their worshippers the truth, that he was so anxious to spread among them. The idea was to let the worshippers themselves admit, that their deities were a powerless lot. That was the idea behind his move to break the lesser deities, leaving

untouched the chief among them, so that he could ask the worshippers, to find out from the chief deity how it had all happened. He felt that it was by this device alone, that truth might dawn on them about their deities.

When the deed was done and the priests came to know about it, they asked him who it was, who had broken their idols. His reply was that they should address that question either to their chief god, who was still intact, or to their broken deities, to speak out how it was, that they were in that condition. Of course, the chief deity nor those broken ones, could give them any answer; and that was enough for Abraham to make them feel, how foolish they were in believing in them.

This was a heavy blow to priesthood. But the struggle against truth was not at an end; the priests incited the masses to avenge themselves against Abraham by putting him to death.

The matter for consideration by our commentators is just this. In the account of this incident of idol-breaking, where is the ground to accuse Abraham that he had lied in any respect. What he did was in pursuit of what he had already announced to the people of his town, that he would one day break their idols so that they might prove, that they had no existence and were of no value to human life. The incident was only a fulfilment of this intention, and no element of untruth is involved therein. Our commentators base their accusations on the *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet of Islam, hardly pausing to consider that every prophet of God was to be regarded as sinless. It is in respect of such wrong interpretations, that Imām Abu Hanifa and after him Imām Rāzī had declared, that no credence was to be given to any transmitter of any *ḥadīth* or the tradition of the Prophet, if it conflicted with the fundamental attitudes of Islam. It would be appropriate to regard the transmitter of the *ḥadīth* concerned as having erred in the process of its transmission, rather than charging any prophet as having committed a sinful act. If loose state-

ments such as this, charging prophets of sinful act are allowed currency, the entire edifice of the institution of Prophethood would straightaway tumble down. It is no doubt true, that the *ḥadīth* concerned is recorded in *Bukhārī* and *Muslim*. But is there one who will vouchsafe Imām Bukhāri and Imām Muslim were sinless persons? They were recorders of what was narrated to them by others. They might have been reputed to be very careful recorders of what was delivered to them; but that alone does not entitle anything recorded as being true to actual facts, especially in a matter such as this, where the reputation of a prophet is involved.

The corpus of *ḥadīth* codified by Bukāhri and Muslim is regarded by the present day Muslims as standing next to the Qnr'ān itself This is not because their selection of the ḥadīth literature was the result of absolute scientific research. It is so because, that was the place accorded to them by forebears, the medieval scholars and we of the present day, have no right to question them. That has become part of our fundamental religious attitude, towards medieval scholarship. It is clearly unsatisfactory. Surely the two recorders, Bukhārī and Muslim, however greatly respected, should not be regarded as exempted from the search-light of the Qur'ān.

The subject will be reverted to for fuller discussion in the *Al-Bayān*.*

* This work could not be executed by Mawlana Azad during his life-time—S.A. Latif.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PILGRIMAGE—AL-ḤAJJ

DELIVERED AT MADINA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1–10

The chapter begins with a reference to the Doomsday and the Resurrection. It points out that it will be a terrible day. It offers a warning to those, who doubt its occurrence and asks them to reflect over the course of man, from the moment his mother conceives the germ of life, and to his making within the womb of his mother, and his emergence into the world, and thereafter his development, decadence and death. Man is asked to consider whether provision is not made by his Creator to oblige him to give account, some day after the close of his life on earth, of what all he had done in the life spent here. The Qur'ān observes, that man is prone to doubt such a reckoning, for lack of understanding born of ignorance. The subject will be touched upon in one of the notes given at the close of this chapter.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] O People! Fear your Lord.
Verily, the shock of the Hour will be a
tremendous thing!

[2] The Day ye shall witness it, every suckling
woman shall forget her suckling and every
pregnant woman shall drop her burden; and every
one shall seem in a state of drunkenness,
although by no means drunken.
The chastisement of God shall be severe.

[3] Among the people there are some,
who in ignorance wrangle about God and
follow every rebellious Satan (evil-monger).

[4] Concerning him (Satan), it is decreed that
whoever shall take him for a friend,
him (that person), shall he (Satan) surely beguile
and lead into the torment of the Fire.

[5] O People! If ye be in doubt in respect of
Resurrection, mark that, of a truth, have
We moulded you first of dust into the form of
a moist germ of life, then of a clot of
blood, then of flesh shapen and unshapen,
that We might give you proof (of Our Power):
and We cause to settle in the womb
(the germ of one sex or the other) at
Our Pleasure for an appointed period of time,
then We bring you forth as babes, then let
you reach your state of maturity:
and of you some die early and
some live on to the age of infirmity,
when memories fail them! The earth, as
one may notice, (in summer) dries
up and looks devoid of vegetation: but
when We pour rain over it, it stirs and
revives and puts forth luxuriant herbage.

[6] This is because that God alone
is Reality, and so it is He Who reviveth the dead,
and that He alone hath Power over everything.

[7] And so (be certain) that the Hour
will indeed come—let there be no
doubt about it—and that God will raise up
those who are in the graves.

[8] Among the people there are some who
in ignorance, wrangle about God
paying no heed to divine guidance or
the Book of Enlightenment,

[9] Haughtily intent on misleading (others)
from the way of God. Disgrace shall be
the recompense in this world; and on the day
of Resurrection will We make such of those taste
a burning chastisement,

[10] (Saying): "This is what thine own hands
had worked for in the past, and God is never
unjust to His servants."

SECTION 2: VERSES 11–22

The Qur'ān now speaks of those who are half-believers and who discreetly sit on the fence. So long as they draw material gains from life, they assure the believers that they believe in God. Once any mishap befalls them, they give up the thought of God and turn to others for aid. Such people deprive themselves of the inward strength one derives from laying implicit trust in God. Whenever any apparent misfortune befalls him, he cannot realise that hope is a force for progress. Indeed it denotes life. On the other hand, despair marks a distinct failure to appraise life at its proper worth. It is why the Qur'ān emphasises, that whatever one's weaknesses are, he should hope to get over them and open a new chapter in life to live aright. The Qur'ān assures man, that God will vouchsafe His Gracious Mercy even to the worst of sinners, if only he can develop the mode of introspection and resolves to make amends. Here is a categorical assurance to this effect offered by the Qur'ān:

> O my servants, who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of God's Mercy, for, God forgiveth all sins. He indeed is Gracious, Merciful. (Q. 39 : 53)

[11] There are some people who serve God
sitting on the fence. Whenever any good
happens to them, they feel at rest; but whenever
any mishap overtakes them, they turn back

(from God), thereby losing both this world and the next. The loss is markedly distinct.

[12] They call upon beside God, that which can neither harm nor profit them. This indeed is falling into deep error.

[13] They indeed call upon one who would sooner harm than profit them. How base the patron and how base the protege!

[14] Verily, God will bring those who believe (in Him) and do what is right into gardens wherein flow streams: indeed God doeth what He willeth.

[15] Let him who (having lost all hopes) thinks, that God will not aid him in this world and in the next, stretch aloft a cord (to hang himself by it), and then snap (it) and then see whether this device of his can bring to nought that at which he was raving!

[16] And thus have We sent down verses clear in themselves; and this because God guideth whom He willeth.

The Qur'ān now points out that life on earth is indeed a field of action and everyone will receive in turn, what he works for, in accordance with his belief and the view he takes of life. It may be that the reaction to what one does may not be discernible in this life, but in the next it will be as clear to him as daylight. The principle applies to everyone—may he be a Muslim, a Jew, a Sabaean, a Christian and a Magian. He who discards deliberately the laws of life will necessarily have to suffer.

The Qur'ān proclaims, that conformity to the law of life is binding on every object of creation. Conformity in this

sense is true devotion to God. In this respect, the Qur'ân makes man to stand in line with the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees and the animals. When every object of creation other than man, even as a tiny leaf of a tiny tree, is intently engaged in conforming to the law of life fixed by God or course of life fixed for it by Him, is it not upto man to acknowledge, that he cannot be an exception to the divine principle of life, and that he too has to conform to a course of conduct, if he is to enjoy the benefits of life in the true sense of the term ? So, only they prosper, who believe in God and act in life in consonance with that belief, and they who go against the laws of life will suffer in consequence.

[17] Between those who believe (in the Qur'ân) and also the Jews and the Sabaeans and the Christians and the Magians and those who set up peers for God, of a truth, God will decide on the day of Resurrection; for, God is Witness of all things.

[18] Seest thou not that everything in the heavens and on the earth adoreth God (obeyeth the law of life fixed by God)—the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and the animals and many men ? And many there are (who do not adore God) who deserve chastisement. And whom God despiseth, there shall be none to honour. Verily God doeth what pleaseth Him.

[19] There are two disputants, who dispute about their Lord: but for those who have disbelieved are prepared garments of fire; upon their heads shall be poured down boiling water.

[20] All that is in their bellies and their skins shall be dissolved.

[21] And for them are maces of iron.

[22] As oft as they, in anguish, come forth from there, they will be turned back into it (and they will be told): "Taste the chastisement of Fire."

SECTION 3: VERSES 23–25

[23] (On the other hand) God will surely bring those, who have believed and done what is right into gardens wherein streams flow. With golden bracelets and pearls will they be adorned therein, and their garments will be of silk;

[24] And this because they have sought a goodly advice and betaken to a path praiseworthy.

[25] Those who believe not and seduce others from the way of God and the Holy Mosque appointed for all men, alike for those who chose to live therein or come to it from abroad, and seek impiously to profane it, We will cause them to have a grievous chastisement.

SECTION 4: VERSES 26–33

The object of the *ḥajj* is now explained as also the benefits accruing therefrom. It is made clear that the benefits were open to one and all and not confined to the Meccans only. No one had any right to prevent any other from participating in the *ḥajj*, as some of the Quraish had done, by creating obstacles in the way of the followers of the Prophet, in the early days of his mission. It is also made clear that the sacrifice of animals, at the time of *ḥajj* is not to make any offering to God, but to provide food for those who congregate there. God does not need anyone's blood or flesh for his use, as has been the belief among

certain sections of humanity. On the other hand, the sacrifice is meant to revive in the minds of the pilgrims, the memory of the great sacrifice, which Prophet Abraham was prepared to make in the name of God, and thus develop in them the spirit of sincere devotion to God :

> [26] And call to mind the occasion
> when We assigned the site of the House (Ka'ba) to
> Abraham and said: "Associate naught
> with Me and keep My House clean for those,
> who go round it, and stand, and
> bend and bow down in prayer:
>
> [27] "And to call people to make
> pilgrimage to it. They may come on foot or
> by fleet camels (or other conveyance) from
> distant places.
>
> [28] "That they may receive its benefits
> and pronounce the name of God,
> on stated days over the animals, which
> He had provided them for sustenance, and
> partake of it yourselves and also
> feed therewith the needy and the poor.
>
> [29] "Then let them tidy up and
> fulfil any obligation they may have imposed
> on themselves, and thereafter, circuit
> the Ancient House (of Prayer)."
>
> [30] This done, let him respect the sacred
> ordinances of God, since it will be
> pleasing to his Lord. Allowed to you are
> cattle (for food) except such parts of
> them as are specifically mentioned to you
> (such as their hair, skin and blood).
> This is how you should avoid filthy rites
> associated with idols and thus avoid also
> (their accompanying) false invocations,

[31] Remaining firm in faith towards God,
without associating anyone with Him.
And whoever associated aught with God,
it is as if he had fallen from on high,
and the birds had snatched him away, or the wind
had wafted him away to a distant place.

[32] Thus it is and (what really matters is that)
whosoever performeth the rites of God,
be it done out of respect (for
the rites) proceeding from the heart.

[33] There are uses for you in them
(cattle) for a specified term and thereafter
their use is at the Ancient House
(as objects of sacrifice).

SECTION 5: VERSES 34–38

[34] And to every people have We
appointed certain rites, that they may pronounce
the name of God alone over the sacrifice
of cattle with which We have provided
them for their food; for your God is
God the One. To Him alone therefore do
you submit yourselves, and give
good tidings to the humble—

[35] To those whose hearts thrill with
awe whenever mention is made of God,
and who remain steadfast under all that befalleth
them, and observe prayer, and give
(to the poor) out of that, with which
We have provided them for sustenance.

[36] And the camels, have We allowed
you to offer (for sacrifice) as marks of
devotion to God; these marks bode much
good to you. So whenever (you offer

them as sacrifice) do it, in the name of God,
as they stand in a row; and when
they fall over on their sides use them for food,
(both for your own selves and also for)
him who is content (and asketh not), and
him who asketh. Thus have We made them
(the cattle) serve your purposes to
the intent you should be thankful.

[37] By no means can their flesh or
their blood reach God: it is sincerity of devotion
on your part (that matters and which alone)
reacheth Him. It is with this object in
view, that He hath subjected the animals to you,
that you may extol the greatness of God
for having guided you, and give good
tidings to those who do good deeds.

In the following passage permission is given to the followers of the Prophet to defend themselves against the Meccans, who had begun to attack them from every side. This permission was given to the followers of the faith, after they had suffered increasing persecution, at the hands of the Quraish for nearly thirteen years. The Qur'ān now makes it clear, that it is the right of the oppressed people to defend themselves against their oppressors and retaliate. This is necessary in the interest of security of life.

Such was the advice given to the followers of the faith, about the close of the Meccan period of the Prophet's mission. They were told, that it was their duty to establish peace and order in the land, so that everyone might live a life of devotion to God and be mindful of his social obligations to every other.

[38] Verily, God will ward off (mischief)
from those who believe (in Him). God indeed
doth not love the treacherous, the ungrateful.

[39] Permission is given (to fight)
those, who have taken up arms against
you wrongfully. And verily, God is well
able to give succour

[40] To those, who have been driven
forth from their homes, for no reason
other than this that they say: "Our Lord
is God." Had not God repelled
some men by others, cloisters and churches
and synagogues and mosques wherein
the name of God is ever mentioned, would
assuredly have been pulled down. Verily,
him who helpeth God will God surely help:
for God is indeed Right Powerfully Mighty.

[41] These are they who, if We establish
them in the land will observe prayer,
and pay the poor-due, and enjoin what is right
and forbid what is wrong. The final
issue of all things rests with God.

The following passage is addressed to the Prophet. He is told that he should not feel disheartened at the accusation of imposture levelled at him by his detractors. That was the weapon of the unbelievers hurled at most of the prophets gone before. But the law of life had its course. Respite after respite was given to those, who would not listen to their advice to take to the right way. The inevitable overtook them. So, even in the case of those, who had given trouble to the Prophet, the law of life would have its course. They were bound to meet with the chastisement they deserved. So far as he was concerned, he should go ahead with his mission and make it clear to everyone, that he was there in their midst, to warn them of the evil consequences which flow from evil deeds. Those who would not listen to him would suffer. It was true that his opponents were growing more and more violent towards his followers. It is also

true that permission was given to the latter to retaliate. But in so doing, they should keep in mind the principle governing the right to retaliate. The principle is that retaliation should not err on the side of excess. If this principle was respected by his followers, they would soon succeed in establishing a new order of life for their people. It would work a revolution in their lives.

[42] And if they charge thee with imposture,
then (bear in mind that) already before them
(there have been other people, who had
behaved likewise with their prophets such as)
the people of Noah, and 'Ād, and the Thamūd,

[43] And the people of Abraham,
and the people of Lot,

[44] And the dwellers of Madyan and
Moses too was charged with imposture!
But I bore long with the unbelievers;
then (the respite given being over) I seized on them;
and what a reaction (to their) rejection!

[45] How many were the cities which
We had to destroy, (the people of)
which had indulged in excesses. The roofs
(of their dwellings) are now laid low in ruins,
and their wells and lofty castles abandoned!

[46] Have they not gone round the land
(and drawn lessons from what they had
noticed therein)? Have they no minds to reflect
over, or ears with which to hear?
It is not their eyes which are blind; it is
their minds which truly are blind!

[47] (O Prophet!) They will bid thee
hasten the chastisement (held out to
them for their wrongdoings). God never fails

what He holds out. (Chastisement will
certainly overtake you sometime or other
even unawares, but you should not reckon time
by your method of reckoning).
For, even a day with thy Lord may at times
appear to you a thousand years as you reckon them!

[48] How many were the cities (the people of)
which were given respite, though they had
indulged in excesses; then I seized
on them. Unto Me all shall return.

SECTION 7: VERSES 49-57

[49] (O Prophet!) Say: "O people!
To you am I (sent) as a plain warner.

[50] "And they who believe and do
what is right, shall have forgiveness
and a generous provision.

[51] "But those who try to discredit
Our Signs shall be the companions of Fire."

[52] We have not sent any apostle or
prophet before thee, in whose desire
(for the reform of his people) Satan (or those
who opposed the Prophet and bore ill-will
towards him) did not try to vitiate in
some manner: but God has in every case
brought to nought what Satan had attempted.
It is thus doth God reaffirm His
Revelations (delivered to His Prophets)—
God indeed is Knowing, Wise—

[53] That He may make the Satanic
attempt to vitiate the purposes of the
prophets serve those, in whose hearts was a
disease and whose hearts were hardened as
a (futile) trial (to work mischief).

Verily, the wicked have gone too far in
their opposition (to Truth).

[54] And those who have been given
the Knowledge of Truth, may know
that the truth is from thy Lord, and may
believe firmly therein and their hearts
incline to acquiesce in it. Surely, God guideth
to the straight path those, who believe in Him.

[55] But (O Prophet!) the unbelievers
will not cease to doubt it (the truth
of your message), until the Hour suddenly
comes upon them, or until the chastisement of
the oweful Day comes upon them.

[56] On that day the sovereignty of God
will prevail: He will judge between them;
and they who have believed and done
what is right will be (allowed to dwell) in
Gardens of bliss.

[57] But they, who have rejected and
discredited Our Signs, shall
have an abasing chastisement.

In three successive verses, 60-62, the expression, 'So shall it be,' has been used at the opening of each verse. The significance of this has to be noted. In the preceding verses, it has been pointed out that disturbance to the security of life is to be countered in the interest of a society of life itself. That is the only way to the restoration of a peaceful life to mankind. Such is the law of life governing the scheme of things in the world of creation. 'So shall it be' simply means: "Let this law of life take its course; let it assert itself." The oppressed must have a chance to fight oppression. No, blame will attach to them if they do so. Only, they should not themselves commit excesses knowingly or wilfully. 'God will certainly help them

if they resolved to defend themselves in right ways. God is aware of the wickedness wrought by the tyrannical among men and in His own way makes them meet the consequences thereof. Every phase of life has to give place to another phase of life, which is not intended to be one continuous monotony. The night gives place to day, and day to night. That is the course of life. The followers of the faith in Mecca should not, therefore, get disheartened at the behaviour of the unbelievers. They will be protected against their oppressors: for God is Truth, and truth will not allow itself to be flouted for long. All that is opposed to truth is bound to nought. The law of God is a law of checks and balances as may be even noted in the phenomenal world of Nature.

SECTION 8: VERSES 58–64

[58] And for them who have forsaken their homes in the cause of God and have been slain or have died, surely, will God provide with goodly provision! For verily God! Indeed He is the best of those who furnish means of sustenance.

[59] He will assuredly bring them in (Heaven) in a manner well-pleasing to them: and indeed God well knows to reward (them), the Gracious!

[60] So shall it be. And whoever has retaliated to the precise extent he has been injured, and has again been wronged, him God will assuredly help: for, God is He Who overlooks (faults very often), the Gracious.

[61] So shall it be; for God turneth the night into day, and He turneth the day into night: and God surely Heareth, Seeth:

[62] So shall it be, for God is the truth, and what they call on beside Him is but a thing, an image of imagination; and surely God is the Lofty, the Mighty.

[63] Seest thou that God sendeth down water from the sky, so much so that the earth becometh green? Surely, God is Subtle, Cognizant.

[64] His, all that there is in the heavens and all that there is in the earth: and indeed God! He indeed is above all wants, the Praiseworthy.

SECTION 9: VERSES 65–72

[65] Seest thou not that God hath constrained whatever is in the earth of service to you and also the ships, which traverse the sea at His biddings? And He doth not let the clouds (from the sky) descend on the earth, except by His permission. God is Right, Gracious to mankind, the Merciful.

[66] And it is He Who hath given you life and will cause you to die and thereafter give you life again. Of a truth, man has failed to appreciate (the goodness of God).

In the closing passage of this chapter, the followers of the faith are advised not to wrangle over mere matters of ritual of prayer, since it has been prescribed in varying circumstances for various people. What matters primarily in religion is sincerity of devotion to God, the one Being, Who is the Creator and Sustainer of life throughout the universe. That has been the call of all prophets and the essence of religion. All else is subsidiary to it. The task of the faithful is to pursue the path of

life laid down in the Qur'ān, and be a pattern of righteous people unto others, even as the Prophet hath been a pattern unto them. If the unbelievers choose to give up their old ways and take to the path of life chalked out by the Qur'ān, they will assuredly prosper in life, both here and in the Hereafter. Else they will meet the consequence of their own deeds. So far as the faithful are concerned, their course is clear. They should steadfastly pursue the straight path shown to them by their Prophet. God will help them, if anyone should come in their way. God is indeed their Liege-Lord, a Goodly Lord, and a Goodly Helper.

[67] To every people have We appointed a
ritual (of prayer) which they observe; therefore, let
them not wrangle over this matter with them, but
bid them to turn to thy Lord (since that is
the main objective of religion).
Thou, indeed, art rightly guided.

[68] But if they still dispute thee in
this matter, (then say), "God best
knoweth (the value of) what you do.

[69] "God will declare to you His
decision on the day of Resurrection in respect
of the matter wherein you have differed."

[70] (O Prophet!) Knowest thou not
that God knoweth whatever is in
the heavens and in the earth.
In fact all this is noted in the Book
(of life)—an act so easy for God!

[71] They worship, instead of God,
something for which He hath sent down no
warranty and of which they have no
knowledge whatsoever. And for those who
commit such a wrong, there shall be no helper.

[72] And when Our clear Verses are rehearsed to them, thou mayest discern a feeling of disdain in the countenance of the unbelievers, and they look as if they are on the point of attacking those who rehearse Our Verses. Say (O Prophet!): "What should be more serious to you than this (the consequence of their behaviour, namely) the Fire, which God hath in store for those, who have disregarded (the verses). And wretched is this final abode!"

SECTION 10: VERSES 73-78

[73] O People! An idea to ponder over is set forth to you. Pay heed to it. Note that they whom you invoke beside God, cannot create even a fly though all of them join to do it. And should a fly carry off anything from them, they cannot take it back from it! Weak, the invoker and the invoked!

[74] Poor is the estimate they form of God! (They scarcely realise that) God is Right, Powerful, the Mighty!

[75] God chooseth (His) messengers from among angels and from among men (as He pleaseth). Truly, God Heareth, Seeth.

[76] He knoweth what is in front of them and what is behind them; and to God everything shall return.

[77] O you who believe! Bend and down and pray to your Lord and do good that you may fare well.

[78] And strive strenuously in the cause of
God in a manner worthy of striving for Him.
He hath chosen you for distinction and
hath not laid on you any hardship in matters of
faith—the Faith of your father Abraham.
(Remember!) He designated you Muslims
aforetime and in this (Book also, you are designated
so) in order that the Apostle may be a
pattern for you and that you may be a pattern
for mankind. Therefore observe prayer
and pay the poor-due and hold fast to God.
He is your Liege-Lord, a Goodly Lord,
and a Goodly Helper.

Life After Death

At the close of this chapter, it seems necessary to deal in some detail certain issues arising out of the text. One of these is the subject of the life following death referred to in verse 6, in which the following statements are made :

(a) That the existence of God is a reality ;

(b) That God will bring the dead back to life ;

(c) That nothing is beyond the power of God to do ;

(d) That a Moment (day of Judgement) is to occur and there is no doubt about it ; and

(e) That those who are dead will be raised up on that day.

The Qur'ānic method of substantiating its truths is not the method followed by dialecticians. It does not adopt their technique to prove a thing. Its method is to appeal to the facts of life as everyone may know and draw an analogy thereform. Take the first of the statements made above. It says if one should doubt the deriving of a fresh life after death, let him ponder on how he himself acquired life in the beginning. One cannot doubt that he is alive. How did he come into life? When

he does not doubt having come into life, why should he doubt that he would come to life again after his death. He should know that it was out of a mere germ formed of an essence of the earth, that he gradually grew into the form of man. If his present life has started from what had no life therein, is it difficult for him to conclude that a fresh life would be given to him once he is dead? Cannot life once given be revived? Why should one imagine, that a life which to the eye may appear disintegrated at the moment of death, cannot be integrated again by the Maker of life namely, God? The potter, who once moulded clay into a pot, can he not reassemble its parts when it is broken and remould it, and give a fresh form to it?

Ponder again, the life-germ of a man finds a resting place in the womb of a woman. It may appear to contain nothing in it. But, the fact is that it contains within it all that constitutes a grown-up human being. And then look at the process of its growth and development, how steadily it takes its final shape, or how many stages it passes before it assumes the full stature of man. From the germ it becomes a clot of blood, which puts on flesh and bones and so on and so forth, till it receives its full form, while it comes out of the womb of its mother. Look again at his development thereafter. From childhood one passes into the stage of youth, and then on to the stage of adolescence and manhood. And having attained his full stature, the process of decline follows, closing with old age and death. The life of man is thus a progressive force marked with its own ebbs and flows. Mark, this process is not peculiar to the human species. It is common even to the world of vegetation. In the womb of the earth, the seed is sown to receive its nourishment from there and its future growth of development. Its course follows the same process, which we observe in the life of man. In every case, one will observe that a distinct law of life is at work. So much so that, for every turn in the movement of life, a term is fixed by Nature. Everything manifests itself at the right moment.

Ponder on all this and similar phenomena. The germ of life out of which man has grown, lies dormant in what you consider as dead earth. If so, why doubt that the life that we live on earth lies dormant in the dust to which we are reduced after death, and that God had the power to give us life once, will revive it at a time fixed for it? Look at the earth on which you stand; for a term which it lies apparently barren. Once rains set in, it puts forth luxuriant vegetation. The process is a continuous process and you do not question. Why do you doubt your revival after death?

In the light of the above exposition, examine the statements of the Qur'ān made in verse 6 of this chapter noted at the beginning of this note. If one of the statements is that a Moment (day of Judgement) is fixed for man, why doubt it?

In this connection certain expressions of the Qur'ān need to be kept in view. The Qur'ānic term for coming into life after death is *ba'th* or to rise up or revive. It may also be noted that what we mean by the term death or extinction of life is not what the Arabic term *mawt* connotes. The Qur'ān uses the same term for a variety of conditions. Even sleep is regarded as *mawt*. It actually means suspension of state or condition of thing and does not mean extinction of life. For, where sleep is styled *mawt* in the Qur'ān, it only denotes suspension for a while of the consciousness of one's ownself. It does not mean the extinction of life. Even so, the term life or *ḥayāt* in the Qur'ānic phraseology has its own variation in application in varying situations. In fact, the state of the life-germ in the earth before its formation into a germ is regarded as also *mawt*, for, in the state of non-existence as a formal germ, it did possess the potent life of a germ lying latent. The life Hereafter, therefore, is to be regarded as an aspect of our present life itself, which lay hidden or latent therein, or the life present till it is to be revived after the stage commonly styled death. It is why, the Qur'ān calls the life Hereafter as

another stage of life or *ba'th.* It is only a passing into another stage of life even as we have passed through successive stages in our present term itself. The stages mark only a change in form and not in the life it contains.

Part XVIII

Chapter XXIII

THE BELIEVERS—AL-MU'MINUN

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BELIEVERS—AL-MU'MINŪN

DELIVERED AT MECCA

SECTION 1 : VERSES 1–22

This is one of the very last chapters delivered at Mecca, and follows immediately the chapter, 'The Prophets' in point of time.

It may be pointed out that by the time this chapter was revealed, the Prophet had gathered around him a tried band of followers, who could be regarded as the embodiment of the principles of life, which the Qur'ān upheld for guidance of man. In fact, they had developed in them talents, such as entitled them to be a pattern for others. The chapter, therefore, begins with a picture of their attainments. The chapter draws attention particularly to highlight the leading features of the character of this band of believers—features without which the picture of a true believer should not be regarded as fully drawn or completed. They are:

1. Offering prayer to God in lowliness and humility.
2. Avoiding everything that is impure or filthy, both in thought and living, and taking to what is good or useful to life, both here and in the Hereafter.
3. Giving to those of one's fellow-men who are in straitened circumstances out of what one has earned.
4. Remaining always careful not to let the stigma of adultery or fornication to stain one's character and
5. Fulfilling sincerely promises made to or agreements entered into with anyone.

Verse 7 makes it clear that no sex-relationship is permissible except the relationship sanctioned by a formal marriage. In Arabia at the time of the advent of the Prophet, slavery was widely prevalent, so much so that, slaves were regarded as items of property one may hold. The female slaves were on that account used by their masters as they liked. This practice was stopped by the Qur'ān by laying down, that no one should touch a female slave except in wedlock. The question of slavery will be treated more fully under the chapter 'Muhammad.'

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[1] Happy now is the state of the believers,

[2] Who in their prayers are lowly,

[3] And who avoid vain talk,

[4] And who are zealous in the payment of poor-due,

[5] And who keep their sex-impulse under restraint,

[6] Except with their wives or any of those whom their right hands possessed (namely, the slave-women whom they have married), for, in that case they shall be free from blame;

[7] But they who seek anything beyond this are indeed transgressors—

[8] And who tend well their trusts and respect their covenants,

[9] And who are careful of their prayers,

[10] These indeed are they,

[11] Who shall inherit Paradise to abide therein for ever.

The following passage refers to the making of man and of his growth, development, death and of his rising up again on the day of Resurrection. The subject is touched upon in the previous chapter, 'The Pilgrimage,' as in several other places in the Qur'ān. The passage refers also to all that God has provided in the heavens and in the earth to afford man a comfortable living. The theme is elucidated further in a note at the close of the chapter.

The reference in verses 17 to 22, to all that is provided in the heaven and the earth, is intended to emphasise the fact that the Providence of God is intently solicitous of the well-being of His creation. The subject is discussed at length in the commentary of the *Sūrtau'l-Fātiḥa*, Volume I of *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* under chapter, 'The Divine Providence.'

[12] And surely of an extract of clay,
did We start the making of man;

[13] Then, in the form of a moist-germ
did We place him in a safe abode;

[14] Then, We turned the moist-germ
into a clot of blood; then, We developed
the clotted blood into a piece of flesh:
then, made We the piece of flesh into
bones; then, We clothed the bones with
flesh; and lastly, did We bring him
forth in his final form. Blessed be God,
the Most Excellent of makers!

[15] Then, surely in due course
you shall have to die.

[16] Thereafter you shall be raised
up on the day of Resurrection.

[17] Mark! We have created over
you seven spheres—and We have not been
neglectful of (the interests of Our) creation.

[18] And (further) We send down water from the sky in due measure, then We let it settle on the earth: and We have power to withdraw it too;

[19] And by it We cause to grow for you gardens of palm-trees and vines, in which there are plenteous fruits for you to eat,

[20] And also (cause to grow) the trees on Mount Sinai which yieldeth oil which is relishing in taste to those, who make use of it for food.

[21] And even in the cattle, there is something which you may reflect on. Out of what is in their bellies, We provide for you a drink (milk); and from them you derive many advantages, and some of them serve you for food.

[22] And on them are you borne (while journeying by land), even as on a ship (while travelling by sea).

SECTION 2: VERSES 23–32

Verses 23 to 51 deal with the experiences of the prophets, who had worked among men before the advent of the Qur'ān.

This is done only in a general way, since the account of a number of the more prominent among them has been given in other chapters of the Qur'ān.

The annals of prophets referred to in these verses offer to man, the necessary lesson from history to warn him against evil-living.

[23] It is a fact that We sent Noah to his people (for their guidance), so (to them) he said: "O my people! Serve

God alone, for, you have no other God than
He. Will you not (in the light
of this truth) live aright ?"

[24] But the leaders of those among
his people, who did not believe (in his message)
said (to their following): "This is but
a man like your ownselves: he fain would
raise himself above you: But if God
had really willed (to send any messengers of
His to us) He could have sent angels to
discharge (the duty of messengership).
We had never heard of this (a mere man functioning
as a messenger of God) from our forebears.

[25] "He is but a mad man:
so bear with him for a while."

[26] He (Noah) said: "O my Lord!
Help me against the charge of imposture
they have levelled at me."

[27] So We said to him through a revelation:
"Make an ark under Our Eyes and as
We direct, and when Our Command is issued
and when (water) gushes forth from the fountains
of the earth, carry into it a pair of every kind
and the members of thy family, except him
on whom the Decree hath already been
pronounced: and plead not with Me
for those who have been wicked,
for, they shall be drowned.

[28] "And when thou and they who shall be
with thee, enter the ark, say; 'Praise be unto
God Who hath delivered us from a wicked folk.'

[29] "And say, 'O my Lord! Disembark
me in a blessed manner; for, Thou art
the best of those who disembark.'"

[30] Verily, in this (event) there are lessons (to take to heart) and thus do We put men to severe trials.

[31] We then raised up a generation (to take their place).

[32] Then We raised (for them) an apostle from themselves who said to them: "Serve God alone, for, you have no other God than He. Will you not (in the light of this truth) live aright?"

SECTION 3 : VERSES 33–50

Verses 33 to 38 give in short the accusations generally brought against the prophets by the disbelievers in all ages. Firstly, they cannot comprehend that a person like anyone of them is chosen as a messenger of God and secondly, that there is a life after death, and that every man is accountable for every deed done during his life-time in the Hereafter.

[33] And the leaders of his people, who did not believe and who discredited the idea of meeting (God) in the Hereafter, and whom We had provided ample comfort in the life of this world, said: "This is just a man even like yourself; he eateth of what you eat and drinketh of what you drink;

[34] "And if you obey a man just like yourselves, then you will surely be undone.

[35] "Doth he assure you that after you are dead and have been reduced to dust and bones, you will be brought forth?

[36] "Begone! Begone! With the assurances held out to you.

[37] "There is no life beyond our life of this world: we die and we live, and we shall not be raised again!

[38] "This is merely a man who foisteth a lie on God; and we are not going to believe him."

[39] He (Noah) said: "O my Lord! Help me against this charge of imposture."

[40] He (God) said: "Shortly, are they bound to repent."

[41] Then did a dreadful Noise rightfully catch them and We reduced them into smithereens. Cast off be the wicked people!

[42] Then after them did We raise up other generations.

[43] No people can either hasten or delay the term appointed for them.

[44] Then did We send (to them) Our apostles, one after another. Oft as their apostle appeared before a people, they treated him as an impostor; and We went on replacing one race by another so much so that We made them but a theme of tales (of bygone days). Cast off be the unbelieving lot!

[45] This done, did We send Moses and his brother Aaron with Our Directions and with clear authority (to implement them)

[46] To Pharaoh and his lieutenants. But they behaved insolently, as they were a haughty people.

[47] So they said: "Are we to believe
in these two mere men, who are like
ourselves and whose people are our slaves?"

[48] And so they charged them both
with imposture, and thus ranked
themselves with those who were to perish.

[49] And We, verily, gave Moses the Book
that they might thereby show the right path.

Verse 50 refers to the early life of Christ lived with his mother, Mary, as the Qur'ān states, 'in a lofty place, quiet and provided with springs,' probably on the uplands of Egypt watered by the Nile.

The rest of the chapter draws attention to the implications warranted by these lessons.

[50] And We made the son of Mary
and his mother serve as a mark (of Our Will);
and We gave them both a shelter in a
lofty place, quiet and provided with springs.

SECTION 4: VERSES 51–77

[51] O Ye apostles! Eat of things
that are wholesome; and act aright;
Indeed, I am Cognizant of what you do.

In the following passage the truth is advanced, that the religion which the prophets of God had tried to spread among mankind, was but one and the same; and it was that mankind should believe in God and live together as a single community devoted to righteous living. The regret of the Qur'ān is, that this idea of unity both in belief and in action, has been distorted by man himself, in whose interest it had been advanced from the earliest times of human history. The Prophet of Islam is asked to pursue his task steadily, and impress upon those around

him, that it is only by believing in God and living righteously, that man can live at peace with himself and at peace with his fellow beings.

The Prophet is asked to make it clear to them that God doth not lay a responsibility on anyone which one cannot bear. The truth is applicable to human life in all its spheres, individual—both material and spiritual—and social. The capacity to live aright is given to everyone, and one is held responsible for his actions to the extent of it as endowed by God.

The Qur'ān also emphasises that easy-living of the over-rich, is responsible for disturbances in social relationship. The accumulation of wealth in but a few hands, is the cause of internal tensions in society and this the Qur'ān condemns in no uncertain terms. It states that everything belongs to God and everyone should work, according to his capacity to earn the good things of life provided by God, but it insists that the benefit of this earning should be made available to one and all, on an equitable basis, so that humanity may feel together, that they are but one family, every member of which shall have the urge in him to be mindful of the welfare of every other.

[52] And truly this religion of yours
is one and the same religion; and I am your
Lord: so be mindful of your duty (in this regard).

[53] But men have divided themselves
in this matter into different sects, one group
rejoicing in what it adheres to.

[54] So, (O Prophet!) leave them
in their error for a while.

[55] Do they fancy that by letting
them have wealth in an increasing measure
and children in greater number,

[56] We are contributing briskly to
their good? Nay, they perceive it not.

[57] (On the other hand) they who fear to displease their Lord,

[58] And who believe in the signs of their Lord, (suggesting to them that everything owes its being to Him),

[59] And who, therefore, join none with their Lord,

[60] And who give (to others) what they give, seriously believing that they are eventually to return to their Lord, (and have to give account of their deeds to Him)—

[61] It is they who hasten after good, and are the first to attain it.

[62] And We do not place a burden on any soul except what one can bear. With Us is a Record which hath noted down the exact capacity of every one; and none shall be treated unfairly.

[63] But to this (reality) they are insensitive. And the deeds they do are other than what they should do,

[64] (And these deeds they will continue to do) till We lay hold on the easy-going among them with chastisement, and they cry for help.

[65] (The Divine reply will issue forth): "Cry not for help this day, for, by Us you shall not be helped:

[66] "My Revelations were rehearsed to you but, you turned back from them,

[67] "Haughtily, and talked lightly of them during your idle hours by night."

The Qur'ān calls upon man to reflect over all those things, which matter in life and exercise reason in everything he does. He should not blindly follow anyone. It proclaims that the truth delivered to the Prophet for the guidance of man was but the same truth, which had been delivered to the earlier prophets. It calls upon the people around him, to bear in mind that the Prophet who has appeared among them to guide them to the right path was not a stranger to them. They knew him intimately and could avow, that he had never said anything, which was untrue. He was just asking them to follow the path of reason, and live aright. They should know that he was toiling in their midst purely in their interests and expected no material gain for what he did for them. It being so, it was upto them to pay heed to what he said for their good. Should they disregard his advice, it is they who will suffer. There might be some among them, who might tempt others to turn away from the path of goodness. Everything will depend on how they behave. The law of life is that everyone shall receive what he works, for, prosperity will attend those who have lived aright, and suffering will be the share of those who have lived wrongly. The criterion of a good or balanced life is indicated by the poise and balance, that subsists in the stellar world and the rest of the universe. The path of goodness lies in maintaining that poise and balance in one's own life.

[68] Can they not think over whether the Word
(revelation) recited is anything different from
what was delivered to their forebears of olden times?

[69] Or do they not know their Apostle (whom
they have always known as a truthful person)
that they should disavow him?

[70] Or say they: "Has he gone mad?" Nay,
he has brought them what is true, but to most
of them truth is bitter.

[71] But if truth were to yield to their desires, surely, the heavens and the earth and whatever is therein would have come to ruin. Aye! We have given them due warning; but they have disregarded that warning.

[72] (O Prophet!) Do they think, that thou dost expect from them any material return (for what you are doing for them)? (Make it clear to them that) whatever thy Lord provideth thee is good enough; and He is the best of those who make provision.

[73] And surely, thou calleth them to the right path,

[74] And, indeed, they who believe not in the life to come, surely, stray away from that path.

[75] And even if We had taken compassion on them and relieved them of the distress they were in, they would still have persisted in their wickedness recklessly.

[76] We had once laid hold on them with chastisement, yet they have not humbled themselves before their Lord, nor will they make any submission,

[77] Until We open on them the door for dire chastisement and they fall suddenly into despair.

SECTION 5: VERSES 78–92

[78] And (say to them): "It is He, Who has gifted you with hearing, and sight and heart. But rarely do you offer thanks.

[79] "And it is He, Who has spread you over the earth and unto Him will you be gathered.

In verses 80 to 83 the Qur'ān asks its readers to reflect on Him, Who gives life and takes it away, and on the alternation of night and day. On pondering the reader would find, that there is nothing single in this universe except the Lord Creator, and everything else exists in twos. The day has a counterpart in night, the male in the female species, man in woman, life in death, life in this world in the life Hereafter. This is the law of life. For details refer to pages 58–66 of *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* Volume I.

[80] "And He it is Who giveth life
and taketh it away, and it is due to Him, that
night and day alternate. Can you not reflect over?"

[81] But their response is the
same as that of those gone by.

[82] They say: "When we are dead
and reduced to dust and bones,
shall we be raised again?

[83] "Of course we have been promised
this, we and our forebears: but all this
looks like the fables of the ancients."

[84] Ask (them): "Whose is the earth and
all that is therein, if ye but know it?"

[85] They will answer: "God's." Say:
"Will you not then reflect?"

[86] Ask: "Who is the Lord of the seven
heavens and the Lord of the Mighty
Throne (the Seat of Supreme Authority)?"

[87] They will instantly answer: "They
are God's." Say: "Will you not
therefore be mindful (of Him)?"

[88] Ask: "In whose hand lieth the power to rule over everything and who protecteth (everything) and Himself needs no protection (from anyone): (answer) if you but know it?"

[89] They will answer, "God's." Say: "Are you then magic-bound (that you do not act in accordance with what you profess)?"

[90] Yea, We have brought them the truth; but curiously they discredit it.

[91] God hath not taken to Himself a son, nor can there be gods conjoined with Him. Were it so, each god would assuredly have taken away what he had created (and formed a separate dominion for himself); indeed some of them would have dominated over the rest. Transcendent is He! He is far above all that they ascribe to Him—

[92] The Knower of the unseen and the seen! Far uplifted is He above what they join with Him!

SECTION 6: VERSES 93–118

[93] Say, (O Prophet!): "O my Lord! If Thou art to let me witness that which you have held out (by way of chastisement),

[94] "O my Lord! Then place me not among those who have done wrong."

[95] Verily, We are able to make thee witness that which We have held out to them.

[96] Repay evil with that which is good: We know best what they attribute (to thee).

[97] And say: "I betake me to Thee against the promptings of satans:

[98] "And I betake me to Thee, O my Lord, lest they have access to me."

[99] On the other hand, the unbeliever will not betake himself to God, till death overtakes him when he will cry out; "Lord! send me back again,

[100] "That I may do the good which I [illegible] failed to do." By no means! These words will he certainly utter, but before them shall lie a barrier till the Day they are raised again.

[101] So when the Trumpet shall be sounded, the ties of kindred shall cease between them that day, and they shall not be able to ask for each other's help.

[102] They (whose deeds) shall weigh heavy in the scales, they indeed shall be blessed.

[103] But whose (deeds) shall be light in the scales—these are they who having lost their souls, shall abide in Hell.

[104] Fire shall scorch their faces and they shall remain therein disfigured.

[105] (And they will be asked): "Were not My Messages rehearsed unto you, and did you not treat them as lies."

[106] They will say: "Our Lord! Our misfortune prevailed against us and we became an erring people.

[97] And say: "I betake me to Thee
against the promptings of satans:

[98] "And I betake me to Thee, O my Lord,
lest they have access to me."

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not My Messages rehearsed unto you, and did
you not treat them as lies."

[106] They will say: "Our Lord! Our
misfortune prevailed against us and
we became an erring people.

[107] "Our Lord! Take us out from here; if we go back again (to evil living), we shall indeed prove ourselves to be wrong-doers."

[108] He will say: "Be driven down into it; and address Me not.

[109] "A party truly of My Servants was there, who said, 'O Our Lord! We have believed (in Thee); forgive us then, and be merciful to us, for, Thou art the best of those who show Mercy.'

[110] "But you received them with such scoffs, that they suffered you to forget my warnings, and you laughed them to scorn.

[111] "Verily, this day have I rewarded them for their patient endurance; these are they who are indeed blissful."

[112] He (God) will say: "How many years did you stay on earth?"

[113] They will say: "We stayed a day, or part of a day; (for certainly) ask them who keep account."

[114] He will say: "Short indeed was the time you stayed, if you could but realise it!

[115] "Deemed you then that We had created you in vain, and that you should not be brought back again to Us."

[116] So let God be exalted, the King, the Truth! There is no God but He! Lord of the Gracely Throne!

[117] And whoso calls on another beside God, for which there is no justification, shall

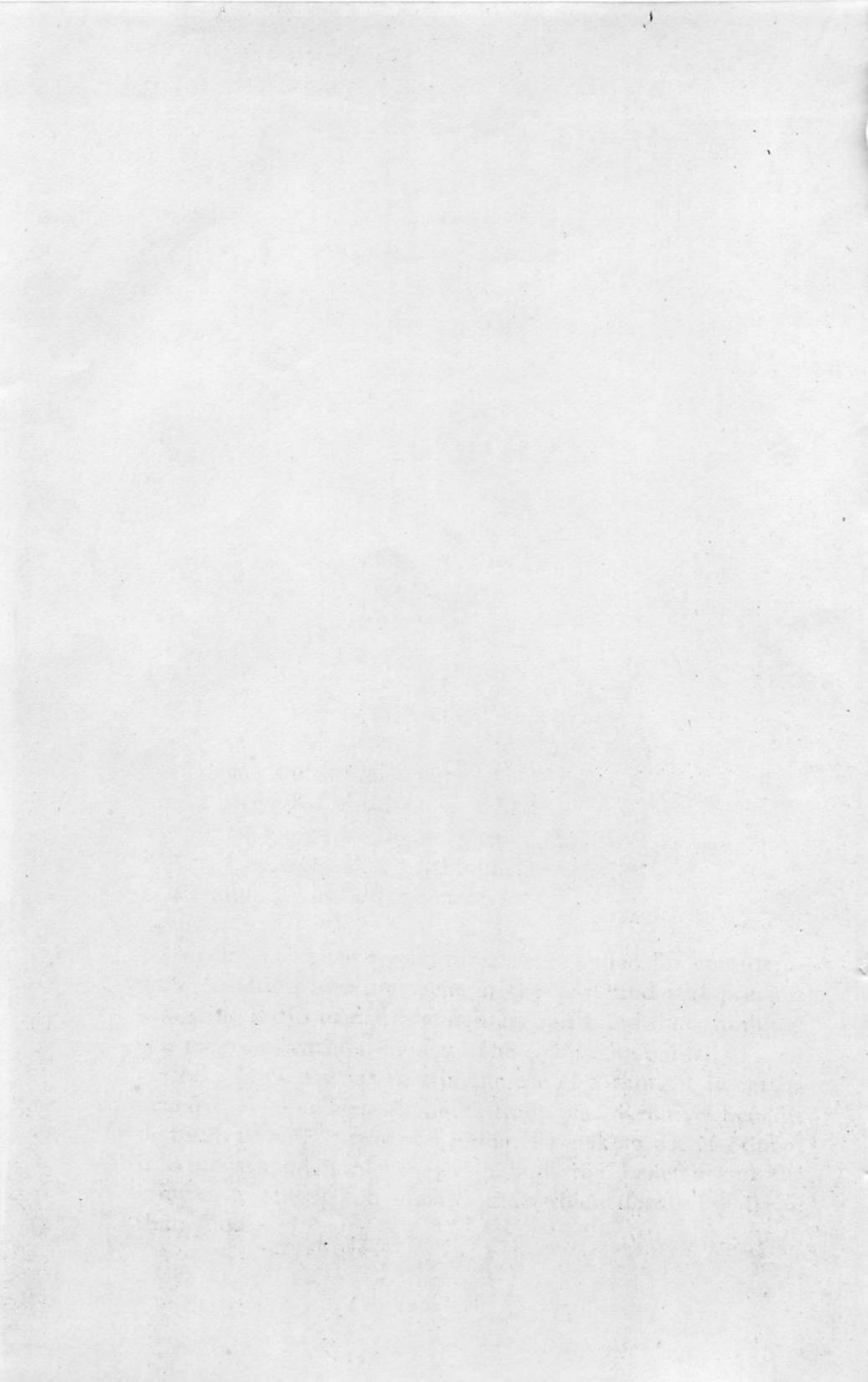
surely, give account to his Lord! Indeed,
it shall fare ill with the unbelievers.

[118] And say: "O my Lord! Forgive and
have mercy; for indeed Thou art the best
of those who show Mercy."

The Making of Man

At the close of the chapter, an important theme touched upon therein needs special mention and this relates to the making of man and his future. Verses 13 and 14 of the Qur'ān point to the six stages through which this process is gone, beginning with the life-germ entering the mother's womb, and leading to its emergence from it, and its subsequent development. On the basis of this process of development of life, the Qur'ān bases its argument in favour of future of man, after the close of his life in the present. This is what is called the life Hereafter.

The subject of the making of man has been touched upon in other chapters as well. The Qur'ān emphasises that *the making of man is an evolutionary process,* each stage disclosing the potential which is latent in the life-germ. The early commentators of the Qur'ān did not catch the significance of the process and consequently failed to appreciate the value of the evolutionary urge at work in life and link rationally the life Hereafter to the life in the present. Scientific investigation into the origins of species made in the 19th century have demonstrated how vivid was the vision, which the Qur'ān presented of this process over thirteen hundred years earlier. In fact, scientific reasearch in this line will have to make a further headway, before it can catch a glimpse of the development of man, after his death in the present as visualized by the Qur'ān.



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